# VARANGIAN RUS

LEV PROZOROV

BERSERKER

BOOKS

**Lev Prozorov**
**Varangian Rus. Our Slavic Atlantis**

***Pagan Rus –***

## Synopsis

*This great civilisation has sunk into the abyss of time. Its proud history has become a legend, a fairy tale, a myth. Its brilliant culture has been consigned to oblivion. The names of its illustrious cities – Arkona, Retra, Vineta – are now less well known than the settlements of the Incas or Aztecs…*

*When we speak of lost civilisations, we usually picture ruins overgrown with vines in distant jungles or wrecks at the bottom of the ocean; we recall legendary names: Atlantis, Lemuria, Mu… But it turns out that the abyss of oblivion swallows up just as effectively as the waters of the ocean. It turns out that it was not in pre-flood eras, but less than a thousand years ago, and not on*

*other continents, but right on our doorstep, there existed a great civilisation of our ancestors, which rivalled the Holy Roman Empire and mighty Byzantium on equal terms – and is now virtually forgotten.*

*Hardly any books are written or films made about this Aryan civilisation. No one, apart from a handful of specialists, remembers its less fanciful, multifaceted gods, the campaigns and victories of its formidable princes, or the great battles that raged on its shores. It has even been forgotten that it was from there that our ancestors came, that this is our ancestral homeland, our Slavic Atlantis – Varangian Rus'.*

*Its true history is being reconstructed in a new book by the author of the bestsellers *Pagan Rus'*, *Bogatyr Rus'*, *Svyatoslav the Brave – the Russian God of War* and *Evpatiy Kolovrat*.*

# Lev Prozorov
# Varangian Rus: Slavic Atlantis

## Dedications

*To the gods and people of Varangian Rus'.*

*A.F. Gilferding, S.A. Gedeonov, A.I. Pavinsky, I.A. Lebedev, A.A. Kotlyarevsky, D.N. Egorov, A.G. Kuzmin, S.N. Azbelev, V.I. Merkulov, V.V. Fomin*

*And with immense gratitude for her patience to my editor, L. Nezvinskaya.*

## WARNING!

For those who like to think that the Slavs did nothing but plough the land and dance sad round dances barefoot on the grass, wearing wreaths, **this book may prove extremely unpleasant**.

## PROLOGUE

> *– Now, if this were a story about Tutankhamun or those withered Africans who, for some unknown reason, have survived on the other side of the world; if it were Babylon, or China, or some race as distant and mysterious as the 'moon man' – then your newspapers would have reported every detail, right down to the toothbrush or the cufflink. But about the people who built your parish churches, gave names to your towns and trades, even the roads you walk upon – about them you never wanted to know a thing.*
>
> **'The Curse of the Golden Cross'**
>
> *G.K. Chesterton*

What comes to mind when we hear the words 'lost civilisation'?

Ruins teeming with snakes in the heart of a poisonous jungle, the liana-entwined masks of bizarre idols, the stones of pyramids bleached white by the scorching sun and sandy winds, an ancient temple at the bottom of the ocean, appearing for a moment in a submarine's porthole. Something alien and distant, lost in the darkness of millennia.

But it turns out that the abyss of oblivion swallows up civilisations just as surely as the ocean depths, and it does not take long ages for a whole world to turn into a fairy tale, and for that fairy tale to be forgotten.

Not on some distant continent, not in prehistoric times, not so far from us – here, in Europe, less than a thousand years ago, an entire civilisation perished. Do not look for books about it on the shelves

of shops and libraries – no books have been written about it for a very long time. Not a single film has been made about this civilisation. Only a few know the names of its teeming cities, the names of the strange multi-headed idols it worshipped, or the names of the battles that raged on its shores. For most readers, however, its very existence remains a mystery – Plato's legendary Atlantis has been more fortunate in this respect. There are books and films about it… but how many people would recognise the names of the Velians and the Rerians? How many know what Retra is – no, not 'retro', but specifically 'Retra'? And Volyn – not Volyn in Ukraine, but specifically Volyn – who remembers that a city of that name was once called 'the largest city in Europe'? And what do you know about Vineta – no, no, not *Winnetou*, the Native American chief, but specifically Vineta?

All this is all the more surprising given that the bearers of this civilisation were not the Atlanteans, who perished without heirs, sinking 'in a single day and a single calamitous night' into the depths of the ocean of the same name, nor were they the Etruscans or Sumerians, whose language was incomprehensible to the peoples who succeeded them (which does not prevent a huge number of people from claiming to be their descendants). The blood of the creators and heroes of the vanished civilisation flows in the present-day peoples inhabiting the shores of the Baltic. An 'Ossi' – an East German – or a Dane, a Swede or a native of Poland's Baltic coast, a Latvian or an Estonian, is highly likely to carry some proportion of their blood; every day they walk through towns, over hills and along shores named in the language of that civilisation. And this applies in particular to the Russians.

Our people, our country, owe their very existence to this very civilisation. Its blood flows through our veins, its language is akin to our own, its people carved out trade and military routes across our lands and founded cities upon them that still stand today. It gave us our first princes.

And yet – we have forgotten them. For the vast majority of Russians, what I am about to discuss in this book will come as news; it may even seem like fantasy, a fabrication of the sort so often found in tales of vanished civilisations, forgotten peoples, and lost worlds.

This makes my story all the more necessary. A story of the ancient, primordial Varangian Rus, our own Slavic Atlantis.

## Chapter I
## WHY DO WE KNOW SO LITTLE ABOUT IT

*No chronicles have survived. We are*
*piecing together a mosaic bit by bit.*
*The works of pre-revolutionary*
*scholars. Seventy years of silence.*

*This cup to the children of ancient*
*times! Glory to you, our forefathers!*
*Friends, the mighty are no*
*more; There are no more*
*leaders of victory; Their*
*homes were scattered by the*
*whirlwind; Their graves were*
*ploughed over;*
*And the flames of rust have*
*devoured Their helmets and*
*chainmail;*
**V.A. Zhukovsky**

Unfortunately, the civilisation that perished on the southern shores of the Baltic Sea left us no chronicles. If anything of the sort was kept, it was only at pagan temples, and there is no doubt it must have perished along with them at the hands of the bearers of the new faith, be they foreign Germanic invaders or our own people – for often the newly converted become more intolerant than even the most fanatical of those they converted. There was no one left to record the legends either. A little more than usual

Fortunately, there are genealogical traditions – family trees of the descendants of the nobility of Varangian Rus', who adopted a foreign faith and language but preserved the memory of the names and kinship of their great ancestors. However, even these genealogies have come down to us in very late manuscripts, dating from the 16th to the 19th centuries. And that is all. As a result, the history of these peoples has to be pieced together literally bit by bit – from foreign, often hostile, chronicles of the Franks, Danes and Saxons; from travellers' notes; from the lives of those who 'enlightened' the Varangian shores with a foreign faith; from treaties, charters, maps, legends and sagas, from the folklore of descendants who left their ancestral homeland, from the memory of the land – archaeology – and the memory of the language. It is interesting that more has survived from this civilisation than people realise – though no one is in any hurry to make what has survived public, and a priceless artefact – an altar to a pagan god, brought back as a trophy, a testament to the triumph of the new faith – lay undisturbed in a Christian church until modern times, before being transferred to the local history museum, where it remains, unknown to the descendants of those who once revered it. In much the same way, in distant England, place-names and monuments commemorating sea expeditions from the southern shores of the Baltic have been preserved—not just in remote hamlets, but across entire counties—yet I suspect their inhabitants, too, remain largely unaware of the people to whom they owe the names of their native places. Useful information about the Slavic Atlantis may even be found, for example, in the coats of arms of the nobility who settled on its lands and who are partly descended from its princes and knights: these have preserved a wide variety of details about the ancestors of their bearers – from their beliefs to their headgear.

It cannot be said that no books were ever devoted to the civilisations of the Baltic Slavs. In their time, they were a very popular subject. This began in the mid-19th century, when nationalist sentiments among both Slavs and Germans were on the rise. Germany was moving towards unification, Pan-Slavic sentiments were emerging, and the fate of Baltic Rus', situated precisely on the border between the Slavic and Germanic worlds, could not be ignored.

The first study specifically devoted to our topic was the comprehensive work by Alexander Fedorovich Hilferding (a renowned collector of Russian bylinas and a prominent figure in the Slavophile movement), published in 1855 as *The History of the Baltic Slavs*. Six years later, the researcher published the next part of his work, *The Struggle of the Slavs with the Germans on the Baltic Coast in the Middle Ages*. This fascinating book, full of useful information, is still read with great interest to this day. Although the author's Slavophile convictions are very much evident on every page. When Hilferding naively explains how 'the Slavs *were naturally drawn* ever further west', whilst the Saxons living at the mouth of the Elbe were forced to fend them off, and then, a few pages later, complains that the proximity of predatory Germans had corrupted 'the Slavic tribe, generally so peace-loving and gentle', one does not know whether to laugh or cry. And this is repeated constantly – lamenting some quality which the unfortunate Slavs supposedly lost as a result of their proximity to the Germans; at times it seems that Alexander Fedorovich is more distressed not by the subjugation of the Slavs by Germanic arms, nor by the burnt cities and captives turned into slaves, but by the fact that the vile Germans taught the innocent Odrians and Velets such horrors as bellicosity, hereditary aristocracy, the worship of personal gods, and so on.

Meanwhile, it is worth looking at the Slavs in other regions – and there one finds exactly the same thing, and from the very first mentions of them. Let us recall, for instance, the reply of the Slavic chieftain Dabritha to the envoys of the Avar khagan, preserved by the Byzantine chronicler Menander: 'Has there ever been born in this world, nor does the sun's rays warm, a man who could subjugate our power? It is not others **who have grown accustomed to ruling** our land, **but we who have grown accustomed to ruling others**'. And of this we are certain, **as long as there are war and swords in the world**'. Is there much meekness and peacefulness in these words? Yes, words are just words – but when the Slavs invaded the Balkans, sweeping through as far as the Peloponnese and Morea, when they reached Italy, striking terror into the heart of the Pope – were they meek and peace-loving then, too? And does not Jordan – and many other writers after him – mention the tribal nobility of the Ants and Slavs? And does not Procopius

mention, in his very first detailed account of the way of life and customs of those same Slavs and Ants, their veneration of the God of Thunder? And all this – as early as the 6th–7th centuries.

Or again – once more, the wicked Germans defiled the pure preaching of the Christian faith to the Slavs with 'ancestral enmity' and a 'spirit of exclusivity'. And yet, here is the oddity: Hilferding himself speaks of a long-standing – if not centuries-long – alliance between the pagan Saxons and Frisians and the pagan Veleti. He also, quoting Thitmar, states that the Saxons recognised the nobility of the Slavic aristocracy (referring to a captive who became the mother of Wilhelm, Bishop of Magdeburg). Finally, he describes how a noble Saxon, in reviling the Obodrites, uses the *Gospel's* comparison of a pagan to a dog. So was it tribal pride that hindered
the 'Christian brotherhood' – or did the imported faith sow discord amongst tribes who had previously regarded one another as equals?

If one disregards these ideological shortcomings, the book is very good and informative.

A further ten years later, the work by the Polish Slavist Adolf Ivanovich Pavinsky, *The Polabian Slavs in Their Struggle against the Germans in the 8th–13th Centuries*, was published. The title speaks volumes about the book's tone. That said, works no less, erm, pointed were published 'from the other side' as well. However, I.A. Lebedev's two-volume work *The Last Struggle of the Baltic Slavs against Germanisation* (1876), despite its even more dramatic title, is more serious in tone. The first volume is entirely devoted to the analysis of sources – a first in Russian literature on this subject.

Published in 1874, the seminal work by Alexander Alexandrovich Kotlyarevsky (better known for his studies of Russian paganism) is devoted to the law of the Baltic Slavs.

Crowning this group is D.N. Egorov's two-volume work *Slavic-Germanic Relations in the Middle Ages. The Colonisation of Mecklenburg', which appeared in print two years before the revolution. Although many consider his work overly sceptical – he is very sharply critical of both certain sources (Helmold comes in for particular criticism) and his predecessors – this book is nonetheless, in many respects, truly definitive. Whether one agrees with Dmitry Nikolaevich or not is a matter of personal choice, but it is definitely worth reading. Firstly, because the book contains a great deal of information not found anywhere else. Secondly, because the ideas expressed by Yegorov in his work are by no means limited to the issues he examines in his book.

And thirdly, because this is the last book published on this subject in Russian.

Yes, reader, that's quite right – the last one… well, until the one you're now holding in your hands.

People have been writing, after all. They have been working, compiling multi-volume monographs. After all, I have mentioned here only the most significant works by the most renowned authors, without mentioning Pervolf, Budilovich, Filippov, Florinsky and many others. I have, for the time being, left aside the works of Gedeonov and Zabelin, in which the southern shore of the Varangian Sea was linked to the theme of the origins of Rus' and its first princes. It is easy to calculate – on average, in the Russian Empire from the mid-19th century, roughly one **fundamental** work devoted to the Slavic population of the southern Baltic coast was published every ten years. But after the revolution, over the entire seventy years, and the twenty that followed – not a single one. Not at all. In general. Absolutely. No thick books, no thin ones, no two-volume works, no single-volume works. Even at the height of the flirtation with the Slavs, in the 1940s and 1950s, when the 'Kremlin Highlander' proclaimed himself and his party to be the 'new Slavophiles' – no books on the 'taboo' subject were published. One might think that the Germanised nobility of the Russian Empire might have had reasons to keep quiet about a civilisation that had been ruined, not without the Germans' involvement – but no, it was not they who kept silent.

Soviet scholarship even devoted a voluminous tome to Atlantis itself (N.F. Zhirova,
'Atlantis', 1964, if anyone is interested). But certainly not to 'Slavic Atlantis'…

All right, you don't write about it yourselves. So reprint it! No. It hasn't been reprinted, has it…

Articles were published – in anthologies and specialist journals. I would particularly like to highlight the articles devoted to the connection between 'Slavic Atlantis' and the origins of Rus' – by Vilinbakhov, Engovatov and Kuzmin – but even these were merely articles, incomparable in scope to the fundamental works of Gedeonov or Zabelin, and which remained largely unknown to the vast majority of readers. But that is all. In books on the history of the Slavs, the centuries-old history of the South Baltic inhabitants was mentioned in a few pages at best. More often than not, it was brought to light only in passing, in a few lines, whilst reproaching the Germans – and the 'West' in general – for their annihilation. The founders of 'the largest city in Europe' of their time found themselves lumped together with the Tasmanians or the Mohicans.

That is all, reader; we have been talking about science. In fiction, it was much the same. 'Rügen, with its fearsome deities, and the mysterious Pomeranians, and the Polabian Slavs, who called the moon Leuna, are only touched upon in passing in the songs of Alexei Tolstoy,' Velimir Khlebnikov once wrote, and very little has changed since then.

And finally, let me give you one more example. I'm sure you, the reader, have heard of the great Russian composer Nikolai Andreyevich Rimsky-Korsakov. Yes, indeed, 'Sadko', 'The Tale of Tsar Saltan', 'The Snow Maiden', 'The Golden Cockerel', 'The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh' – his operas are always on everyone's lips. And even if you're not an opera lover, you've heard his music – in fairy-tale films or cartoons.

*Princess Voislava's costume for the opera-ballet *Mlada**

But – unless you are a fan of his work, or as fascinated by the Baltic Slavs and Varangian Rus' as the author of these lines, you have probably never heard of his opera-ballet 'Mlada', the tragic story of the princess from Arkona, her beloved Yaromir, and her villainous rival Voislava.

And you certainly haven't seen any films, cartoons or, most likely, stage productions based on it. Because this opera hasn't been staged for a very long time.

It was performed a few times at the Mariinsky Theatre during the composer's lifetime – and that's all. Absolutely all, you see? Under Soviet rule, every one of the composer's operas was staged many times in a multitude of theatres – *Koshchei the Deathless* and *The Tale of Tsar Saltan* – not to mention
'The Snow Maiden' and 'Sadko'. But 'Mlada' – no.

It is Rimsky-Korsakov's only opera… no, that's not quite right. It is ***the only opera*** dedicated to the Baltic Slavs.

In such a climate of total silence, it is hardly surprising that the vast majority of

Russian readers have absolutely no idea about Varangian Rus'.

But as for why this situation has arisen around it… That is a completely different matter, dear reader. And we shall discuss that later.

For now, to conclude the first chapter: it is particularly regrettable that abroad, people know at least a little about this civilisation – but they do know. Here I am, having once again visited the capital of our still vast country, leafing through a charming children's book, *The Vikings Are Coming*, by a certain Mauri Kunnas.

I had a laugh at the adventures of the Scandinavians (good heavens, when will they stop using the word 'Viking' as a synonym for 'Scandinavian', spouting nonsense about 'Viking gods', 'Viking women' and 'Viking kings'?! Mind you, more on that later—we'll get round to it in due course), depicted as various little animals. Naturally, the inhabitants of other countries are portrayed in the same style: Prince Yaroslav the Wise as a wolf, the Byzantine Emperor—heh heh—as a hippopotamus.

But that's not the point.

What caught my attention was this: in this work by a Western author, published for a Western readership as something quite familiar, the Wends are mentioned. First, the Viking Gunnar, seeking to win a girl's favour, boasts of his victory over the Wends; then Olaf, the leader of the band, seeking to recruit a simple-minded, burly berserker into his ranks, tells him that Olaf's sister was 'kidnapped by the evil Wends'.

In other words, even the children there are well aware that the Wends existed, and that they were by no means some hapless, unsuccessful folk who were bullied by the evil Germans, but were in fact quite formidable folk, capable of causing the Normans no end of trouble.

Now, show me a Russian children's book about the origins of Rus' or the Viking Age. And show me the word 'Wends' in there. And make sure it's not just another fantasy from 'The White City', but a proper children's book. So that the Wends are portrayed not alongside the 'Book of Vles', 'the Aryan saviour Bus Beloyar' and other such far-fetched nonsense, but alongside real historical events.

Please show me!

I'll say 'thank you'.

This is about children. Adult Anglo-Saxon readers – or, more broadly, English-speaking readers – can familiarise themselves with Erik Christiansen's work *The Northern Crusades*. Germans can read Joachim Herrmann's 'Die Slawen in Deutschland'. I suppose it would be pointless to ask why these works have not been translated here.

## Chapter II
## IN THE DARKNESS OF SILENT AGES: FROM WAR AXES TO THE VENEDS

*Groping in the darkness of the*
*centuries. The power and*
*powerlessness of archaeology.*
*Battle Axes – the first*
*'push eastwards'.*
*The Lusatian culture – a contemporary of*
*Troy and the Scythians. Burials beneath the*
*ground. In the light of the sources. The*
*enigma of the Venedi.*
*'As long as they're not Slavs'.*
*Newcomers or natives? The*
*'Germanic remnants' theory.*
*Ptolemy's Suoveni and Veleti*

*Tombs, mummies and bones are silent;*
*Only words are given life.*
*From the darkness of the ages in the world's graveyard*

*Only writings resound.*
**Valery Bryusov**

These words of the great Russian poet very accurately describe the complexity of the problem facing researchers of the history of any people who left no written records behind. Archaeology is, alas, a silent witness. It cannot answer for itself what language the people of a particular culture spoke, or to which people they belonged. Often, the same culture – say, the Imenkov culture in the Middle Volga region – is described in the works of different researchers, depending on their views, as Slavic, then Ugric, then Turkic. What can be said about how to distinguish, from archaeological remains, peoples who differ even less from one another?! Literally – by touch.

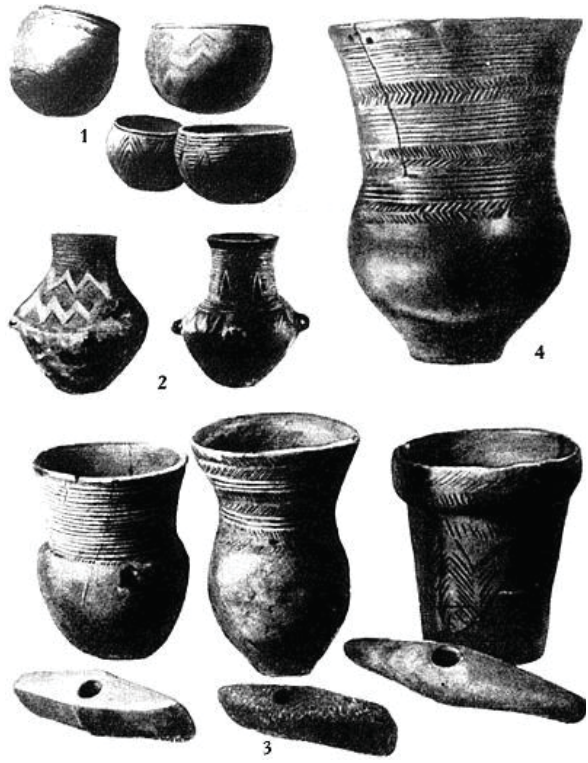
Archaeology tells us that the shores where Varangian Rus' arose have a long and glorious history. We can determine how the inhabitants of the southern Baltic lived, where they travelled and with whom they interacted – but we cannot name not only their names, the gods they worshipped, or the battles in which they were victorious or defeated – we can only speculate even about the language they spoke. Just over five thousand years ago, on the very shores we are discussing, the so-called Battle-Axe Culture emerged. Its people mastered the art of stone polishing to perfection – their axes were made from it; they domesticated livestock, may well have practised some form of agriculture, and mastered the complex art of smelting copper and bronze. The vanguard units of the Battle Axes – the Fatyanovites, Balanovites and Abashevites – were the first in human history to launch an 'eastward push' from the shores of what would become the Varangian Sea and the Baltic, towards the banks of the Oka, Volga, Don and Kama rivers.

In the Moscow Historical Museum, one can see their pottery, stone weapons and the striking bronze sculpture from the Galich hoard. It was they, and not the mythical
'Finno-Ugrians', who settled the wilds of what would become the Russian Zalesye. Some researchers saw in the Battle Axes Indo-Europeans in general, the common ancestors of the peoples who spread the Indo-European languages as far as Ireland in the west and India in the east. Others saw in them the Teutons, already then carrying out the 'Drang nach Osten', bringing the light of the first civilisation to the troglodytes – as one might easily guess, such theories were particularly popular in Germany. A third group opted, so to speak, for the happy medium, seeing in them common ancestors – but not of all Indo-Europeans, only of the Germans, Slavs and Balts (Latvians, Lithuanians and a few other peoples who have since assimilated into the Russians, Belarusians, Poles and Germans). Finally, not so long ago, the American researcher of Lithuanian origin, Maria Gimbutas[1], put forward the theory that the Battle Axes were the ancestors of the Balts specifically. That is to say, of course, it is understandable that every bird praises its own marsh (with the exception, perhaps, of those found in our parts), but Mrs Gimbutas pointed to serious grounds for her hypothesis – namely, hydronymy, in other words, the names of rivers and lakes. It just so happens that what sticks most firmly in people's memories are not the names of towns and villages (these, as we have seen all too well over the past century, can change their names three times in the space of a single century – for instance, St Petersburg managed to be known as Petrograd, Leningrad and, finally, St Petersburg again; Tsaritsyn – Stalingrad – Volgograd was not far behind), nor of mountains and forests, but specifically of bodies of water. So, Maria Gimbutas established that practically all the vast lands once settled by the Battle Axes have Baltic names. No exception – and, reader, I would ask you to bear this in mind, as we shall return to this point later – is the Varangian coast, all the way to Jutland. While this may not prove Gimbutas's theory, it does lend some weight to her hypothesis.

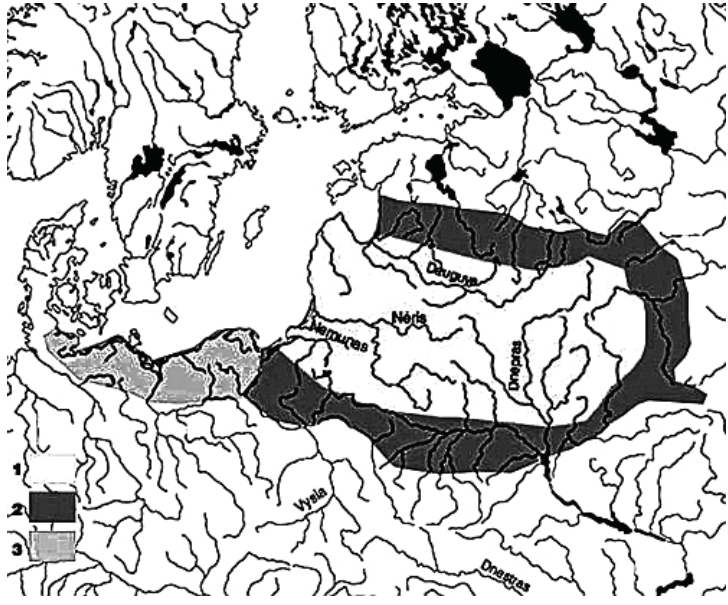
1 Alas, in the US they are not particularly well versed in the subtleties of foreign cultures – Gimbutas is a *male* surname; according to the customs of Mary's ancestors, she should have been called Gimbutene. Instead, it turned out something like Natasha Rasputin from American comics.

*The appearance of a Fatyanovite*

*Idol of the Sun Deity, Abashev culture*




*Tools and tableware of the 'Battle Axe Culture'*



*Baltic place names. Map by M. Gimbutas.*

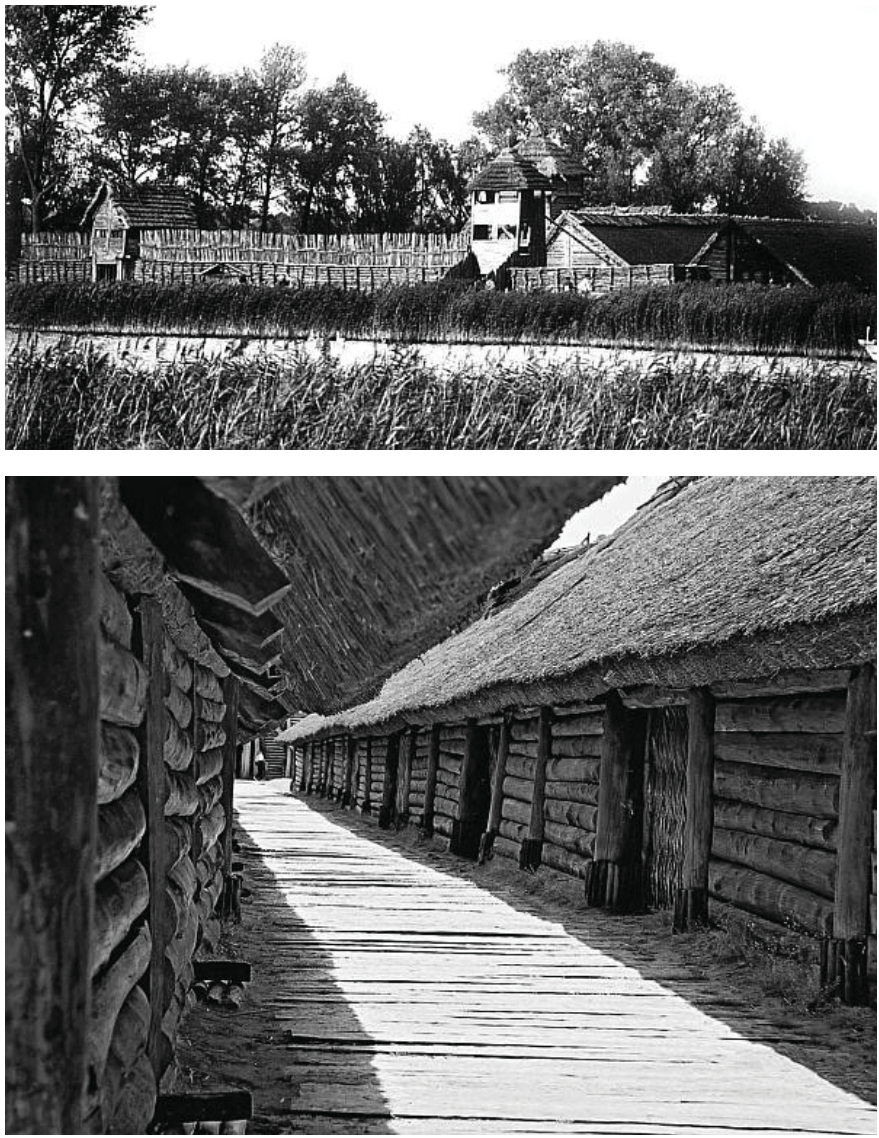
As can be seen, the range of opinions is extremely wide. The situation is no less complicated with the Lusatian culture, which is considered (and again, by by no means all archaeologists!) to be the heir to one of the branches of the Battle Axes. Even the geographical boundaries are not entirely clear here – on some maps, the Lusatian culture is 'separated' from the Baltic region, yet extends southwards to the Adriatic, reaching as far as northern Italy! On others, however, it extends south barely beyond the source of the Oder, yet 'gains' access to the Baltic Sea – between the mouths of the Vistula and the Oder itself. It emerged thirty-two centuries ago, when Troy still stood, Mycenae shone in all its glory, and on Crete, 'amidst the wine-coloured sea', the Minotaur lurked in the Labyrinth – and its history came to an end four centuries before the start of the Christian era, when three hundred Spartan warriors of King Leonidas went down in history for their feat, whilst in the steppes north of the Black Sea – the Euxine Sea – the Scythian kingdom was drawing to a swift close. Not far from Gniezno, on Lake Biskupin ('Bishop's Lake'), archaeologists discovered a superbly preserved hillfort in the peat – the remains of an ancient fortified settlement from the Lusatian period. The peat has preserved everything – fishing nets and pots, boats and wheels… Now, on the site of this most outstanding monument to Lusatian culture, stands an open-air museum, a vast reconstruction where anyone who visits can, if only for a moment, immerse themselves in that distant era.

*A woman in a costume from the Lusatian period*

Whilst the Battle Axes were predominantly cattle breeders, the people of the Lusatian culture were mainly farmers, and very sedentary ones at that – judging by the cemeteries that were used for centuries. Whilst the Battle Axe people buried their dead in the ground—which has enabled us to learn about their physical appearance—the Lusatian culture deprived us of this opportunity by switching to cremation.

On this subject, B.A. Rybakov made a very strange comment, linking the transition from earthen graves to funeral pyres with the shift from a belief in the transmigration of souls to a belief in

the afterlife, to which the dead go. A very, very strange idea – for in a country where, to this very day, the majority of the population firmly believes in the transmigration of souls (remember – 'the Hindus invented the 'good religion'?'), and still cremates the dead on pyres, whilst Christian culture, completely rejecting the transmigration of souls, is just as resolutely opposed to cremation, and indeed buries the dead.



*Reconstruction of a Lusatian culture settlement*

In accordance with the custom of non-mound burials of cremated remains in urns, the Lusatian culture, together with its related cultures, was termed the 'culture of burial urns'.

Whilst the Battle Axes still had one foot firmly in the Stone Age, the representatives of the Lusatian culture (I am very tempted to shorten this cumbersome term to 'Lusatians', but to avoid confusion with the tribe of the Lusatians, whom we shall mention later, I shall refrain) were already fully-fledged representatives of the Metal Age – their tools were made of bronze, and later iron ones also appeared. Among other things, the people of that era made bronze razors. They were also familiar with trade: objects from distant lands – the Mediterranean and the Scythian steppe – are frequently found in their settlements. However, not all finds of this kind point to trade – the mass discoveries of Scythian arrows at other hillforts suggest, rather, distant raids by nomads – and that the southern reaches of the Lusatian culture seemed to them a desirable, rich source of plunder.

Incidentally, Rybakov also briefly mentioned 'imitations' of the late Cretan Linear script found amongst the inhabitants of the Lusatian culture. Unfortunately, he did not elaborate on this topic – though one might think, what could be more interesting? A silent witness might have found a voice – if only for a few words. But from them, one might at least have guessed his language!

Some researchers attribute the Lusatian culture to the Germanic peoples, naturally; others to the Illyrians who ventured far north (the ancestors of modern Albanians); a third group to the Thracians, kinsmen of the famous Spartacus; a fourth to the Celts; and finally, quite a few researchers attributed them to the Proto-Slavs.

The eminent archaeologist V.V. Sedov, now, sadly, deceased, regarded the Lusatian culture as the cradle of a whole range of European peoples – the Germanic peoples, the Celts, the Slavs, the Italics – in short, all the major ethnic groups of Central Europe.

Adjacent to the Lusatian culture on the shores of the Baltic Sea lay the related Pomeranian culture. It had a rather curious custom: the top of the urn, into which the ashes of the deceased were poured after the body had been cremated on a pyre, was shaped like a human head with a face. Interestingly, clay ears with clay earrings were sometimes attached to this head – thanks to which we know that this custom had already emerged in the southern Baltic region at that time. Sometimes several clay earrings were inserted into the clay ears of female heads – it seems that piercing enthusiasts in that era had worthy predecessors. The lids of the urns were made in the form of caps – round caps with fur trim, exactly the same as those that would remain in use in Russia right up until Peter the Great's reforms.

At the junction of the Lusatian and Pomeranian cultures, the Podkleshe burial culture emerged. It is so named because the dead were buried not in elaborate face-up urns, but in simpler pots, covered on top with bowls, known as 'klesha' in Polish. It is precisely this 'Podklesh' culture that Sedov links to the emergence of the Slavs. In those days, the ancestors of the Slavs interacted actively with the Celts of the Hallstatt and La Tène cultures, who were then settled in southern Poland and Bohemia – the German name for Bohemia, 'Böhmen', preserves the name of one of the Celtic tribes, the Boii.

During the subsequent Pszewo culture, the shores of the Baltic Sea finally came to the attention of Mediterranean historians. From the darkness of prehistoric, illiterate times, we emerge into the light of historical sources – a light which, to tell the truth, is still rather dim.

The first word it plucks from the darkness is 'Venedi'.

In fact, it seems that there were not two, nor even three, peoples with this name in Europe. There were the Adriatic Veneti or Eneti, whom Greek legends traced back to Troy. Remnants of their language have survived – and they have little in common with the Slavs. Far more interesting in this regard are the Baltic Venedi, who will be the main focus of this discussion. It is difficult to say who exactly those Venedi were whom Julius Caesar encountered in northern Gaul – another people with the same name, or the Baltic Venedi.

We first learn of the Baltic Venedi from the notes of Cornelius Nepos, who recounts how, in 58 BC, a storm drove a ship… of Indians… onto the shores of northern Germany. The confusion here stems not only from the similarity in names but also from the geographical conceptions of the ancients – they believed that the Indian Ocean was connected to the northern seas. Researchers do not

have any doubt that it was the Venedi (Vinidi, Vindi in some spellings) who were meant. The Baltic Venedi were first described in greater detail (again, if it was not Caesar who dealt with them Caesar) was described in greater detail by Publius Cornelius Tacitus in his work 'On the Origin of the Germans and the Location of Germania'. He placed them between the following tribes: the Suebi (ancestors of the modern Swabians) to the west, the Pevkini or Bastarnae to the south, the Sarmatians to the south-east, and the Fenni (the Saami, the Lapps – the ancestors of the Estonians and Finns reached the Baltic Sea later, according to the Finnish philologist Sätele, only by the 5th century) to the north-east.

'Whether the Pevkins, Veneds and Fens should be classified as Germanic or Sarmatian, I really do not know, although the Pevkins, whom some call Bastarnae, resemble the Germanic peoples in their language, way of life, sedentary nature and dwellings. All are untidy, and idleness and inertia prevail among the nobility. Due to intermarriage, their appearance is becoming increasingly unsightly, and they are acquiring Sarmatian features. The Venedi have adopted much of their customs, for they roam the forests and mountains—whatever may exist between the Pevkins and the Fenni—for the sake of plunder. However, they can more readily be classed among the Germanic peoples, because they build houses for themselves, carry shields and travel on foot, and at that with great speed; all this sets them apart from the Sarmatians, who spend their entire lives in carts and on horseback.'

I strongly recommend, reader, that you commit this little masterpiece of Roman ethnography to memory. A German is a European barbarian who is not a Sarmatian. That is all. The rest is irrelevant. Tertium non datur; there is no third option. Of the three tribes – even the Fenns and Lapps! – Publius Cornelius Tacitus only mentioned language in relation to the Pevkins and Bastarnae, the very thing that first comes to mind today when we speak of the kinship of peoples. For Tacitus, however, language is not so crucial: if you walk on foot, live in a house, and take shelter behind a shield – splendid, you are a Germanic.

Not so long before that, Gaius Julius Caesar had also nonchalantly classified the Germans as a sub-group of the Gauls. I fear that here, too, shared customs – such as, for example, wearing trousers and a reluctance to shave or cut one's hair in the Roman manner – played a greater role than any other criteria.

Therefore, one can only conclude that a tribe is 'Germanic' if there is evidence of its language. For example, regarding the Langobards-Vinuli, their historian Paul the Deacon writes: 'for in their language the word "lang" means "long", and "bart" means "beard"'. Here, one can speak of the tribe's Germanic origin. Nor can the Goths be excluded from the Germanic peoples, although the sources mention, alongside Germanic names such as Hermanarich, Ataulf, for instance, or Ulfilas, names with a completely different sound – Godila, Vitimir, Vademerka. These names may suggest that the term 'Goths' was sometimes applied to Slavs who had joined the Gothic tribal confederation, or that names passed from the Slavs to the Goths – just as the Slavs sometimes adopted the names of their neighbours. But the Gothic language itself was Germanic, and this, however disappointing it may be to some readers, is indisputable. The Latin epigram 'Barbarian Feasts' laments the fact that, to the sounds of the Gothic speech 'Eils! …scapia matzia ia drincan', no one composes poetry any more. I think even someone not particularly familiar with Germanic languages would recognise 'heil' and 'drinken'. Moreover, the existence of a Germanic language was attested many centuries later by the Franciscan monk Guillaume de Rubrouck, who travelled from the Pope in Rome to the Khan of the Mongols in 1253. In Crimea, he claimed, 'there were many Goths, whose language was Germanic (teutonicum)'. If the Goths spoke German even in thirteenth-century Crimea, where they certainly had no one from whom to 'pick it up', then all the more reason do we have no grounds to doubt their Germanic language a thousand years earlier.

Let us return, however, to the Venedi.

Having appeared in Tacitus's work, the Venedi have wandered through the pages of the writings of the geographers of the Eternal City for half a millennium without any particular adventures. Minor discrepancies in determining their exact location are natural, and it is difficult to say whether they reflect changes in the tribe's actual borders, or merely a difference in the views and knowledge of the informants of the Roman scholars. We learn the names of various tribes living

nearby, but that is, perhaps, all. Not a word about their customs or language. The Sons of the She-Wolf were renowned for their pragmatism for good reason – they do not wage war against the Venedi, and apparently do not trade with them in earnest – so why bother translating a valuable papyrus? Yes, there are such people. They live o-o-o-over there (or perhaps three sandals' width to the right… or to the left). And that's all; what more do you want?

Things began to move forward when those very peoples—who lived not far from the Venedi and had managed to wage plenty of wars against them—well, and trade with them too, I suppose—took up the stylus—or the quill.

The Gothic historian Jordanes, in his work 'On the Origin and Deeds of the Goths', writes as follows: 'In Scythia, the first tribe from the west is that of the Gepids, surrounded by great and glorious rivers; to the north and north-west flows the Tisya; to the south, this same region is bounded by the great Danube itself (Danube. – *Ë.Ï.*), and to the east by the Flutavisius; swift and full of eddies, it rushes impetuously into the waters of the Ister (also the Danube. – *Ë.Ï.*). Between these rivers lies Dacia, which, like a crown, is encircled by the rocky Alps. On their left slope, descending northwards, starting from the source of the Vistula (the Vistula. Yet a few lines later, the confused Jordan will refer to the very same river as the Viskla. – *L.P.*), the populous tribe of the Veneti is spread across vast expanses. Although their names now vary according to different clans and localities, they are nevertheless predominantly known as the Sklaveni and the Antes.

(…)

These Veneti, as we have already mentioned at the beginning of our account… are of a single origin and are now known by three names: Veneti, Antes, and Sklaveni. Although now, through our own fault, they are rampaging everywhere, at that time they were all subject to the authority of Hermanarich.

So it turns out that the Goths, who waged a long and fierce war against the Veneti-Venedi, regarded them as direct kin of the Slavs. And other Germanic peoples, incidentally, did too. More specifically, this name became established among the Germanic peoples for the Western Slavs, in particular for the tribes of the southern Baltic coast, the creators of the civilisation about which I am about to tell you, dear reader.

It is claimed that the Slavs themselves never called themselves by this name, and that no one but the Germans ever referred to them as such. Neither of these claims is true. The Polabian Wends from the vicinity of Lüneburg, who preserved their language until the 18th century—the era when dictionaries were first compiled—referred to their own language as 'Wenske'. And, what is far more interesting, the Baltic Finns – that is, the Finns-Suomi and Estonians themselves – still refer to Russians as venaja and vene or venelainen, respectively. Such unanimity between the Germans and the Finnish tribes, who were unlikely to have had any opportunity to interact prior to the 12th-century Crusades, could hardly have arisen if the people themselves – or, more precisely, the peoples themselves – of the southern Baltic had not called themselves by that name.

I should also point out one further circumstance. It is very interesting to note the tone in which Jordanes, a Goth and a member of a tribe never known for its pacifism, speaks of the Veneti and their kinsmen: 'because of our sins, they run rampant everywhere'. That said, Tacitus speaks of them in exactly the same vein: 'for the sake of plunder, they roam the forests and mountains, whatever may exist between the Pevkini and the Fenni'.

The first century, by the way. What was Alexander Fedorovich Hilferding on
a 'gentle and peace-loving nature'? Or had the wicked Germanic tribes already managed to corrupt him so by Tacitus's time?

Unfortunately, it has now become fashionable in archaeological, linguistic and historical circles to deny any evidence of Slavs prior to the 6th century. They say that it was only at that time that mentions of the Slavs first appeared, and therefore there could not have been any Slavs before then. And the Venedi, therefore, cannot be Slavs – since they brazenly existed long before that now-sacred date.

This brilliant research method is applied only to the Slavs. No one hesitates to speak of the Ugrians, say, centuries before they were first mentioned in sources in the tenth century. No one is troubled by the fact that the Teutons and the Cimbri encountered the Greek

navigator Pytheas long before Julius Caesar first mentioned the Germans. No, such strict requirements are imposed on the Slavs – and only on them. The situation is exactly the same with the attribution of archaeological cultures and the interpretation of unfamiliar names… at times it may seem that the main criterion of such 'scientific rigour' is 'just not the Slavs!'. Turks or Balts, Celts or Iranians, Scandinavians or Finns, of course. But not Slavs. That is out of the question. This applies not only to the period before the 6th century. But to that period, first and foremost.

It is only through this sentiment, prevailing in academic circles, a sentiment that is, in the most direct and literal sense, Slavophobic, can I explain the fact that the Slavic origin of the Baltic Venedi, despite the evidence of two unrelated languages and the clear indication of a Gothic chronicler from as far back as the sixth century, is not merely disputed – it is rejected outright.

Now, following the deaths of the archaeologist Sedov and the linguist Trubachev, I fear this attitude will become widespread.

Meanwhile, it is a hindrance. It is a very tangible hindrance to unravelling the many mysteries of history, including our own.

In particular, it prevents us from providing the obvious and natural answer to one question regarding the history of the southern Baltic coast and the surrounding lands, namely: where did the 'pre-Slavic' population of these lands when the Slavs arrived there? It is traditionally believed that these places were inhabited by 'Germans'. This is believed, of course, because that is what the Romans wrote. The other neighbours of these lands, as well as their own population, left no written records. And we already know the methods by which the Romans distinguished Germans from non-Germans. To put it briefly, the people of the regions we are interested in travelled on foot more often than on horseback (though they were by no means exclusively pedestrians – spurs appear quite early in the cultural layers of local hillforts and settlements), lived in houses rather than in tents, and used shields in battle. Oh yes, it can be stated with a high degree of certainty that they were not Sarmatians. That, in fact, is all that follows from the fact that these peoples are classified as Germanic in Roman sources.

The official view is that the Germanic tribes inhabiting those areas left to conquer the Roman Empire, and Slavs settled in the territories they vacated. Another version claims that the Germanic tribes were driven out by Attila's invasion (we shall also say a few words about this spectre that haunted the 'progressive public' of the time, but later). All these fine theories come up against one fact that is disheartening for their supporters. The names of most Slavic tribes and tribal confederations in the region between the Laba (Elbe) and Oder rivers closely mirror the names of the 'Eastern Germanic' tribes that inhabited the area during what might be called classical antiquity, or, in other words, the heyday of the Roman Empire.

Here is a table of correspondences compiled by V.P. Kobychev in the 1970s. On the left are the tribes of the Roman era; on the right, their Slavic 'successors'.

| | |
|---|---|
| Лугии | Лужичане |
| Ругии | Ругяне или руяне |
| Силинги | Слензяне |
| Вельты | Велеты-лютичи |
| Лемовии | Лемузы |
| Марсинги | Марачане (мораване) |
| Гелизии | Геленсичи |
| Хатты | Хуттичи |
| Дидуны | Дедошане |
| Хизо-[барды] | Хижане |
| [Ланго]-барды | Бодричи |
| Земноны | Земчичи |
| Боланы | Поляне |
| Вандалы | Венеды |
| Варины, варны | Варны |

Here, perhaps, the parallel between the Lombards and the Bodrichi seems a bit of a stretch. All the more so because, as we shall discuss later, there were no Bodrichi at all, but rather the Obodrites (for their part, the Lombards acquired this name only after leaving their ancestral homeland; prior to that, they were known as the Vinuli, according to their chronicler Paul the Deacon). On the other hand, the list could be expanded – for instance, the Grani mentioned by Jordanes bear a striking resemblance to the Ukran, both in sound and meaning.

The significance of this fact is underlined by its complete uniqueness. Nowhere else in the Slavic world do tribal names replicate the tribal names of pre-Slavic indigenous peoples to such an extent. The only other examples that spring to mind in this regard are the Serbian tribe of the Duklians in the site of the Hellenic Dioclea, and the Northerners on the Desna, whose name bears a suspicious resemblance to that of the Sarmatian tribe of the Savars, who once inhabited that area.

But that is all. Both in the East and in the South of the Slavic world, the Duklians and the Northerners represent the exception rather than the rule. On the whole, however, the Istroi, Liburni and Mezei were succeeded by the Trebunians and the Zakhlumians. The Budini, Nevri and Geloni were succeeded by the Dregovichs, Drevlians and Polans. The Smolians, Milings, Ezerichs, Verzichs and Vayunichs have no predecessors or namesakes on the lands of the Balkan Peninsula. And the neighbouring tribe of the Dregovichs is a prime example of the Slavs' staunch adherence to the tribal names of their ancestors – after all,
'Dregovichi' derives from the word 'dryagva', meaning 'marsh' – hardly a characteristic feature of the Balkan landscape! The name tells us that its bearers came to the rocky hills of Hellas from marshy, damp lands.

And only in the far west of the Slavic world, in the region between the Elbe and the Oder, does the exception become the rule. Which at the very least implies that no horde of Attila swept away any indigenous peoples – otherwise, from whom would the Slavs have subsequently learnt all these names and designations? Surely they did not follow Roman maps on their way to the Elbe?!

Incidentally, another point is unclear – where on earth did these tribes go, having supposedly vacated the land for the Slavs, either voluntarily or under Attila's coercion? After all, apart from the Vandals and the Rugians (about whom we shall also have a separate discussion), none of the listed
'Germanic' tribes did not make their presence felt in the lands of the crumbling Roman Empire! Nowhere outside the boundaries marked by the Labe and the Oder will we find any Lugi, Chisobardi or Varni…

This gave rise to a different theory – the theory of 'Germanic remnants'. Allegedly, the Germanic tribes actually remained in their original places, whilst the Slavic population was relatively small and superficial. That, it is said, is why these lands fell so *easily* to the Germanic peoples, and why the memory of the Slavs, their language and customs faded so *quickly* – to the extent that the Slavs were but a handful amongst the indigenous peoples who remained in their original homes (there was even talk of German

commoners and Slavic lords!). As one might easily guess, such a theory was spawned by the 'gloomy Germanic genius'. Everything was brought into play here – including the clearly forged lists of the first Lübeck councillors, where German first names were paired with obviously fictitious surnames such as 'von Arkon', 'von Yulin' (who else would have said that the inhabitants of these distant cities had any business on the Lübeck council) and so on, as well as a passing remark by the Anglo-Norman chronicler Orderic Vitalis, who claimed that the Lutici worshipped—so to speak—'Gwadan, Tur and Freya'. For it seems clear that Orderic simply transferred the beliefs of his own pagan countrymen onto the Lyutichs – just as the author of 'The Tale of Mamai's Battle', without beating about the bush, had the 'pagan' Mamai to call upon Perun and Khors, just as the Viking sagas described 'the shrines of Thor' in Finnish Biarmia, and just as Julius Caesar confidently named the Gallic gods Jupiter, Apollo, Mars, Mercury and Venus. The first person known to us to resort to this technique was 'the Father of History', Herodotus – he told his fellow Athenians that in Egypt, Ares, the god of war, was worshipped with the head of a falcon, whilst in Scythia he was depicted simply as a sword stuck into a pile of brushwood.

I shall not go into detail now about how 'easily' and 'quickly' the Germanisation of the Slavic Atlantis took place. We shall discuss this later. However, the theory of Germanic remnants comes up against two insurmountable obstacles – firstly, the accounts of Christian missionaries who visited the lands of the Obodrites and the Pomorians. They travelled extensively through the lands east of the Elbe, describing towns and pagan temples[2], lakes and oak groves, but nowhere did they so much as hint at the people they encountered speaking a Germanic language they could understand! Yet, according to the theory of Germanic remnants, there ought to have been a considerable number of such people left, if not the majority!

Let us suppose that the missionaries somehow overlooked such an 'insignificant' detail as the presence of a multitude of their own kinsmen in the Wendish lands. But there is another obstacle – the local language, the names of villages, hamlets, rivers and tracts of land. Very often, even when the former inhabitants of a land have been driven out or exterminated, it is the language of the land – its place-names – that preserves the memory of them. To avoid delving too far back through the centuries in search of examples, and to steer clear of the slippery slope of dubious etymologies—such as the quest for 'Finnish' roots for the names Ilmen, Suzdal, Moscow and Ryazan, with which so-called linguists still dabble—let us take a more obvious example. Among the states of the United States of America, twenty-five bear names derived from the languages of the Native Americans – Utah, Iowa, Texas, Wisconsin, Alabama and many, many others. So, had a significant number of Germanic peoples remained in the lands between the Oder and the Labe, their presence would have been reflected in the place names.

And here, too, it 'does not fit' with Germanic origins. If we look at ancient, medieval[3] maps and land charters – in which settlements and all manner of geographical landmarks are frequently relocated – we shall see that the place names in these regions by no means reflect the Germanic language.

There are Barnovychi, Vershychi, Hostradychi, Mysledarzychi; there are Horislav, Dargomyshl, Teshimir, Khotyn, Slavyatin, Chekhov; there are Borki, Podlugi, Uezd, Rybnytsia, Kremen, Glyna and Zayezherye, there are Ratae, Svinare and Kovale, there are Lupiglovy and Belokury, there are Pozdivolk, Turin, Mogilin, Torgov. There are Belbog, Radigoshch, Perun, Svyatogora and Trebnitsa.

But when it comes to Germanic names, things get tricky.

So personally, I prefer to believe that the tribes listed were Venetic, Slavic.

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2 Incidentally, they saw no temples dedicated to 'Gvodena, Tura and Freya' anywhere; only Orderic, from distant Britain, could have imagined such a thing.

3 These must be medieval maps. Modern place names, even those sometimes tracing back to Slavic origins, have changed beyond recognition over the centuries. It could lead to confusion, as with Gilferding himself, who, upon seeing the word 'Ziesar' on a map of his time, decided that the Slavs had heard of Caesarea. In fact, on medieval maps this name appears as Zayezherye – a word that is undoubtedly Slavic, but there is no mention of Caesarea…

Well, for example – let's take the lands of the Varins-Varns. Precisely those who, according to the creators of this theory, ought to have been counted among the 'Germanic remnants'.

In 1232, the following were found there: Lake Varinskoe, the River Tepnitsa, and the Studenyi Stream (as I have already mentioned, lakes, rivers and other bodies of water are the most reliable indicator; in New England, where there have been no Native Americans for three or four hundred years, the majority of river and lake names are Native American). In addition, we find there the Golensky Meadow (Guolenske lug) marsh, Zhivanov Forest, the Rostrubovitsa River, Lake Dushinskoe, the Dushnitsa Stream, Lake Belch, the village of Predel between Yazviny and Wanove Mogili, Makhnachi, Mirovo, Poglovy, Dolgie Lugi and Vodrovy Laz.

I don't know about you, reader, but as far as I'm concerned, all this was left behind by the Slavs rather than the Germanic peoples. Interestingly, the aforementioned Marija Gimbutas recognises the first mention of the Slavs, the 'Suoveni', on Ptolemy's map (2nd century). Let me remind you once more – she is an American of Lithuanian origin, a person whom only a very stubborn paranoid could accuse of Slavophilia. As for our own researchers, having latched onto the 6th century, they remain unwilling to see anything Slavic beyond that boundary – neither individual words, nor the names of tribes that later appear as clearly Slavic, nor indeed their own pet theory – the 'common Slavic self-designation'. They insist on a later scribal error, transforming the Suoveni into the Stanovi and, for some reason, regarding them as Balts – although no such tribe is known in the history of the Baltic peoples. But… not Slavs – that is, scientifically.

The 'tribe' [4]I am referring to is the Veleites. We shall encounter them many times in the pages of this book; the very first mention of them is on that same map by Ptolemy, alongside the Suoveni.

In Ptolemy's time, the Slavs were already living on the shores of the Varangian Sea.

## Chapter III
## IN THE GLOW OF GREAT FIRES: FROM THE FALL OF ROME TO BRAVALLUS

*The genealogies of the Wendish princes. Radagaisus. Krok, Krak, Krakis. The mystery of the Huns. The Rugians as federates – the Varangians of Rus'? Odoacer, the first hero of Rus'. The 'Tidrek Saga'. The 'Utrecht Chronicler' – the Velets against King Arthur. The Frisian-Saxon-Veletic alliance. Wendel. Scandinavia: the mysterious konung Visbur. Envoys with gusli: 'noble savages'? Spies? Magi? The battles for Denmark: Saxo Grammaticus. The Battle of Bravall – the end of legend, the beginning of history.*

Well, knowing all this, we cannot dismiss the genealogical data on the Mecklenburg princes published in Russian by Vsevolod Igorevich Merkulov. The rulers of Mecklenburg were descended from the Wendish princes and made no secret of it; on the contrary, they were proud of it. According to their ancestral traditions, their progenitor was Radegast – Radagaisus or Redegast of the Roman historians, a barbarian chieftain who, in his day, struck the Eternal City and the empire in its twilight years with no less terror than Attila. He is portrayed in the chronicles (especially those by Christian authors) as a barbarian among barbarians, more fearsome than any of the Goths or Vandals – for the leaders of those tribes were already mostly Christians – whereas Radagaisus was a fervent pagan. Moreover, this 'barbarian of barbarians' did not lead mutinous Roman soldiers of barbarian origin, but a horde of savage tribes living 'from the Danube to the Rhine' (that is, precisely in those regions inhabited by the Venedi, the Lugii, the Veleti, the Varni, the Suoveni and others); his hordes, the terrified Romans claimed, numbered two hundred or even four hundred thousand warriors. Turmoil erupted in Rome; the pagans, who saw in Radegast the punishment of the ancient gods upon the city that had abandoned them, raised their heads; Christian chroniclers mention with indignation the resumption of sacrifices at the old altars. To stop the barbarians

4 More precisely, a confederation of tribes, to use the language of ethnography; a 'principality' or 'land', to employ the terms of Russian chronicles; or, to refer to the terminology of Byzantine chroniclers, 'Slavinia'.

They succeeded literally on the very doorstep of Rome, in the mountain passes of northern Italy, but troops were mustered from across the empire for this purpose; they hired the cavalry detachments of the Hun Uldin and the Alan Goar, as well as Ostrogothic infantry. Legions were even brought up from distant Britain – and Rome never returned there again. The imperial forces were led by the finest commander of the time – Stilicho – who, incidentally, was himself half-barbarian. But it was only thanks to the defected Goths that Radagaisus-Radegast was defeated. Olympiodorus claims that Radegast's finest men ('optimates'), who had been taken prisoner, were incorporated into Stilicho's own guard. Admittedly, Olympiodorus gives a completely preposterous figure for the number of these 'optimates' – twelve thousand. What sort of guard did Stilicho have, then? Even if we assume they've added an extra zero[5], it's still quite a lot…

Stilicho, a devout Christian, decided after his victory over the pagan Radegast to rein in his own adherents of the old ways – lest they should dare to claim that it was the gods who had heeded their prayers and protected the City! He set fire to the sacred relics of the Roman gods – the prophetic scrolls of the Sibyl.

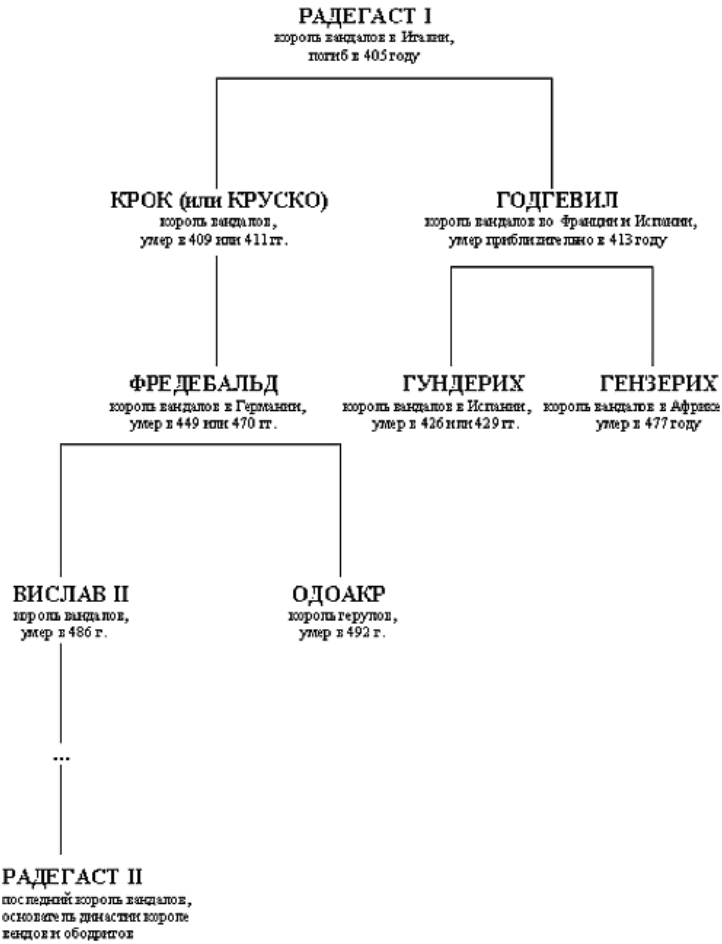
Three years later, Stilicho was killed on the orders of his protégé, Emperor Honorius.

A further two years later, the army of the Christian barbarian Alaric entered the Eternal City for the first time in many centuries, laying waste to the imperial capital with fire and sword.

And many researchers see the memory of Radagaisus-Radegast in the veneration of the warrior god Radegast-Svarozhich in the land of the Veletian tribe of the Ratarians, described by medieval missionaries and chroniclers.

According to Buchholtz's genealogy, Radegast's son was Krok. A number of legends are associated with this name, and not only Slavic ones. For instance, among the Czechs, Krok is revered as an ancient just ruler, more a righteous and wise judge than a military leader. According to legend, he was succeeded by one of his three daughters, all of whom were sorceresses and priestesses. Another married a mighty warrior named Bivoj, who defeated a man-eating boar with his bare hands. The Poles have a legend about a prince named Krak, a wise and just ruler and the founder of Kraków, who was succeeded by his daughter, the sorceress Wanda. The similarities between these legends have long been noted. However, I happened to notice another interesting parallel. There is a Danish legend about Hrolf Krak, a konung renowned more for his wisdom and justice than for his exploits on the battlefield or military campaigns – a rather unusual hero for Scandinavian legends. Just as Krak's era was in Polish history, so too was Krok's in Czech history; Krak's reign was perceived as a sort of golden age of local significance. Like them, he had no sons. Like them, he was succeeded by his sorceress daughter, Skuld. But here the Scandinavian mindset came into play. Long before their conversion to Christianity, the Scandinavians had a very clear attitude towards magic, especially when practised by women. In the saga, Kraki's daughter is portrayed as a malevolent witch who brought about her father's downfall and destroyed the fruits of his many years of care for the land and its people. Most remarkable of all was the fact that Kraki lived during precisely the same years as Krok from the genealogy – if he was indeed the son of Radegast-Radagaisus.

5 Although… how do you work that out? They must have used Roman numerals there, and in those, for example, 5 is V, 50 is L, and 500 is D. You can't get away with just a zero here…




*Buchholz's genealogy (based on the book by V.I. Merkulov)*

*The Czech Krok with his daughters*

Some time later, I came across an article by Meletinsky on the Anglo-Saxon epic, in which he pointed out parallels between the heroes of the Anglo-Saxon ‘Beowulf’ and the Danish saga of Hrolf Kraki. The konung himself was barely mentioned there, as Hrothulf, and a parallel was also drawn between Beowulf (i.e. ‘the bee-wolf’, ‘the Bear’) and Bodvar Bjarki (‘the Bear Cub’), the hero and slayer of monsters from Kraki’s retinue. And then I recalled a thought that had flashed through my mind – when the parallels between Krak, Krok, Krakki and their prophetic daughters came to mind, I couldn’t help but think of Biva, and wondered – could this be Beowulf? It turns out that is quite possible.

*Krak's burial mound near Kraków*

And a table of correspondences between West Slavic and Scandinavian heroes emerged, roughly as follows:

*Wanda*

| | **Чешские легенды** | **Польские легенды** | **Сага о Хрольфе Краки** | **Беовульф** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Миролюбивый, но мудрый и праведный правитель локального «Золотого века» | **Крок** + | **Крак** + | *Хрольф* **Краки** + | *Хродульф* +/- |
| Его дочь-наследница, вещая ведунья | Либуше (сестры Кази и Тета) + | Ванда + | Скульд - | |
| Герой, победивший чудовище | Бивой | | Бодвар Бьярки | Беовульф |

I find it difficult to say what such a similarity between characters signifies. It is hardly a coincidence, but even if it isn't, what does it tell us? Is it a reflection of certain real historical events

– or the remnants of some shared epic? In any case, they point to a much closer intertwining of the fates of the Slavs and the Germanic peoples than is commonly believed.

The next historical figure with whom the fate of the Baltic Slavs is linked can be considered… the Hun Attila.

The Huns are, without exaggeration, the most enigmatic people to have swept across Europe in that whirlwind known as the 'Great Migration'. We have two detailed accounts of the Huns – the work of the Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (on which, in fact, our current understanding of the Huns in general, their appearance and way of life is based), and the memoirs of the diplomat Priscus of Pannonia, who travelled to Attila's capital with a Byzantine embassy. Now, if one were to remove the word 'Huns' from both descriptions, no one would guess from them that they are referring to the same people. Ammianus's Huns are hideous, resembling 'two-legged beasts'. Priscus notes the beauty of the Hun women, and upon meeting a Greek who had settled amongst the Huns, did not recognise him as a fellow countryman until he spoke. Ammianus's Huns spend their lives in the saddle and in their yurts, fearing buildings as if they were tombs, and spend their entire lives on the move, so that none of them knows where they were born. Priscus describes Attila's capital as a veritable wooden city, and also describes the chieftain's palace. Ammianus asserts that the Huns never touch a plough. According to Priscus, the common people of the Huns drink a beverage made from barley, whilst the nobility favour wine – both of which would be unthinkable without agriculture. Ammianus's Huns dress in animal skins and wear them until they fall to pieces. Priscus's Huns dress well, whilst the nobility dress even luxuriously. It is interesting – particularly for our topic – that Priscus refers to Attila as the 'ruler of the distant islands of the ocean'. This most likely refers to the Baltic Sea – Attila's domains could not, in principle, have reached any other 'ocean'. But… how could the leader of a mounted horde of nomads, who, as Ammianus vividly describes, can barely walk once they dismount, have become their 'ruler'? No cavalry, even in later times, ever reached the Baltic shores from the Dnieper or Danube regions. It was all the more impossible a millennium and a half ago.

An examination of the image of Attila in Germanic epic poetry also gives rise to some intriguing thoughts. If you, the reader, have seen Fritz Lang's silent film *The Nibelungs* – and if you haven't, do so at the earliest opportunity, it's well worth it! – then you will recall the central conflict of the second episode, centred on Kriemhild's revenge for the treacherous murder of Siegfried. The Teutonic goddess, in order to obtain a weapon against the murderers, offers herself to a half-beast. This is particularly vividly portrayed in the scene where Krimhild (brilliantly played by Margaret Schoen) descends… no, **condescends**! into the main hall of Attila's court (played no less brilliantly by Rudolf Kleine-Rogge). And the half-beast understands perfectly well that she is condescending to him; he is in awe, he is happy, he is ready to tear anyone to shreds, to carry out any command
– if only the icy statue on the steps would take his hand and take a step…

Brilliantly conceived, incomparably filmed, divinely performed… yet it bears no relation whatsoever to the real image of Attila in the *Song of the Nibelungs*, nor indeed in the earlier legends of the Germanic and Scandinavian peoples. In the Anglo-Saxon poems, when glorifying the mighty and glorious rulers of the past, it is Attila—'Etla'—who is named right at the start, second only to Alexander, but before 'Eormanric', Hermanric, the legendary Gothic king. Incidentally, in other Anglo-Saxon poems too, the Huns are listed first among the peoples. In the Scandinavian *Prose Edda*, the mother of Sigurd's widow – the Scandinavian counterpart of Siegfried – speaks of Attila:

*Attila reveres the Teutonic Goddess ('The Nibelungen', 1927)*

I have chosen for you a great konung; *he is recognised everywhere as the first among all*. And the *Song of the Nibelungs* speaks of Attila—'Etzel'—in the same laudatory terms:

> *Whatever one may think of Etzel, he is an enviable suitor. From the Rhone to the Rhine, he is the most glorious of all men. From the Elbe to the sea, there is no king mightier.*
> *Etzel has made such a name for himself that from all corners of the land many a brave man flocked to his court.*
> *He was friendly to everyone, courteous and boundlessly generous, Whether they were warriors of the pagan or Christian faith.*

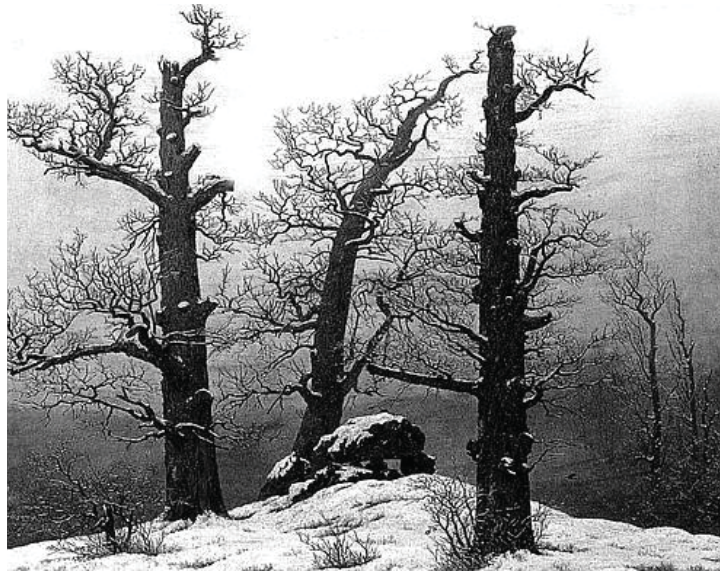
As we can see, the true Germans and Scandinavians felt no contempt or aversion towards the Huns; quite the opposite, in fact. And it is no coincidence that many of the celebrated heroes of Germanic legends served Attila – Theodoric (Dietrich, Tidrek) of Bern[6], Hildebrand, Walder and others. Even the name Attila itself, in its Scandinavian form 'Atli', was subsequently borne by many Scandinavian jarls and konungs, even half a thousand years after his death. The male name Gunnar and the female name Gunn were considered aristocratic in the north. However, if we are to believe Jordanes, in his time the use of Gunnic names by the Goths was widespread.

6 There is, however, some confusion here – it was not Bernese, that is, Veronese, Theodoric who actually served Attila, but his father, whose name was Theodomir – though for the epic, the confusion is minimal.

*Delacroix's Nordic Attila. Joking aside, the 'Elder Edda' refers to Atli-Attila as Longbeard*

One cannot help but wonder: could the proud Germanic peoples really have regarded a swarthy, slant-eyed savage from a tent in such a way? Could such an attitude have developed towards invading conquerors with customs, appearance and way of life that were completely foreign and alien?

It is interesting that the Ukraeni, a tribe that was part of the Veletian Confederation, regarded their princes as descendants of Attila. Beda – *Bå* da, not *Bedà* – the Venerable, an Anglo-Saxon priest, in the 7th century placed the Huns between the Danes and the Saxons. In the lands of the Veleti and Obodrites, which had become Germanic, ancient burial mounds were called 'the grave of the Hun'. And then there is Priscus himself… when recounting the lives of Attila's subjects, he states that they called their favourite drink 'mead', whilst Jordanes, describing the burial of a Hun leader, notes that the Huns referred to their funeral feast as 'strava' in their own language. Two words have come down to us from the language of the European Huns, and both turned out to be Slavic. Had they been, say, Finnish, or Celtic, or Iranian, or Germanic – there would be no further disputes regarding the origin of the Huns.



*'The Tomb of a Hun' on the southern shore of the Baltic Sea. Caspar David Friedrich*

But the Slavs – that's 'unscientific'…

I shall not, however, claim that everything is clear. On the one hand, surely the Roman descriptions of the Huns as nomads who never dismounted from their horses, with fearsome features, must mean something? It was by no means only Marcellinus who made such observations. The tradition of applying the name 'Huns' to steppe peoples such as the Avars or Bulgars must also mean something. Incidentally, the Rus' did not disdain it either – it is no coincidence that the Polovtsians in 'The Tale of Igor's Campaign' and the Tatars in 'Zadonshchina' are called Huns – 'khinov'. On the other hand, there is evidence of the Huns as a Frisian tribe. Bede himself considers them… Germanic. In short, as I said, the question of the Huns is extremely complicated, and, by all accounts, has no clear-cut answer. In any case, the Baltic Slavs played a part in the history of the European Huns, the Huns of Attila, and a significant one at that. It is no coincidence that the same 'Poetic Edda' mentions a certain ' ' Yaroslav[7]among the envoys sent by Attila to seek a bride.

And now it is time to say a few words about a people who are of no small significance to our topic. It is thanks to them, in particular, that we speak not only of the 'Baltic Slavs', but also of Varangian Rus'!

Sometime in the 2nd–3rd centuries AD, the Roman Empire, having already begun to lose the martial spirit that had made the Romans rulers of half the known world, invited a barbarian tribe to settle on its lands near the Danube frontier. In exchange for the land, the barbarians were to defend the empire against other barbarians. In short, rather than giving the empire's land to the barbarians, they gave it to the barbarians. Such 'tamed' barbarians were called federates.

The tribe we are talking about was called the Rugians.

In the 1st century, Tacitus mentions them in the south of the Baltic region and on the island of Rügen. The Goth Jordan speaks of them as surpassing the Germanic tribes (!!) in spirit and body. At the beginning of the 4th century, they appear in the Verona Document as federates of the Empire, settled in the lands of the Danubian province of Noricum. In the following century, they fought against the Goths and allied themselves with

7 To those who like to chuckle at 'Bogdan Gatal' by the Ukrainian writer Bilyk, I would like to remind you that it was **Russian** authors who first began to Slavicise Attila. The researchers Venelin and Ilovaisky, the writers Veltman and Kondratyev, …

the Huns. Incidentally, one of the Hun leaders, Attila's uncle, bore the name Rugila or Rugi. In the 6th century, the Rugian state perished, but the Rugians – or, more precisely, the 'Rugins' – are mentioned in the 7th century by the same Veda the Venerable. From this point on, incidentally, even the strictest advocates of excluding 'unscientific Slavs' from history agree to speak of the Rugins as Slavs – due to the Slavic ending 'in' (compare 'Rusyn', 'Slav' and so on). In medieval Latin-language Germanic sources, the Rus are always referred to as 'Rugi'. The mention of Princess Olga, baptised as Helena, as 'Helena, Queen of the Rugi' in the *Chronicle of Regino's Continuator* is widely known. The Raffelshausen Trade Charter (904) mentions 'Slavs from the Rugians' arriving in this Upper German town to trade. Nazarenko hesitates, not rushing to classify the identification of the Rus and the Rugians as 'literary' ethnonymy based on mere assonance. 'Virtually all instances of its use are in one way or another linked to eyewitness accounts (i.e. reports from eyewitnesses. – *Ë.Ï.*), which significantly undermines the assumption that the term is of a literary nature as applied to Rus', he notes. A.G. Kuzmin, who examined a vast number of such accounts and paid particular attention to source reports concerning the Rus' in Central Europe, expressed himself even more categorically:
'The identity of the Rugians and the Rus' is not a hypothesis, nor even a conclusion. It is a fact that is plain to see, a straightforward reading of the sources; any disagreement with this must be seriously substantiated.'

The identity of the Rugians with the Rus' allows us to answer one of the most important questions in our history – who exactly were the Varangian Rus', who founded our country and gave rise to the Rurik dynasty, which ruled it for seven centuries. The fact is that the Varangians, or, as they are called in the sagas, the Veringi, are regarded by many researchers as a calque, a translation of the Roman term 'federati'. Normanists, who believe that 'Varangians' is a name for the Scandinavians, have devised a marvellous theory: the Normans travelled through Slavic lands to serve in Constantinople, where they were given the name 'Veringi', and then, upon returning to their homeland, were known by that name, under which the Slavs remembered them.

They obviously travelled to Constantinople in silence. Perhaps even in secret and on the sly.

Moreover, the Scandinavians in Byzantium were not called 'federates' – nor could they have been – as they lived too far from its borders. There, they were mercenaries, mercenaries in the palace guard, and nothing more. Moreover, the 'Saga of the Men of the Salmon Valley' states quite clearly that its hero, Bolle son of Bolle, having arrived in Constantinople and joined the retinue of the 'Veringers', was ***the first of*** the ***Normans*** to serve the Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire. To get round this evidence, which is extremely inconvenient for them, the 'Normanists' unfortunately resort to outright forgery under the guise of a translation. Instead of 'Normans', they write 'Norwegians and Icelanders', although the word 'Norman' has never had that meaning. 'Norman' can mean a Norwegian – and remains the self-designation of that nation to this day – or a Scandinavian in general, or, finally, a member of any tribe on the shores of the Baltic Sea. This is how the term was used outside Scandinavia – by the Franks and their southern and western neighbours. In their chronicles, the 'Normans' come to include the northern Saxons (the Nordalbingi) and the Baltic Slavs.

But we have digressed; let us return to the Rugians – or, more precisely, to the Rus, for, as V.I. Merkulov rightly notes, there was no people who called themselves Rugians. It was only after undergoing a double distortion—first by a Roman author who had heard the name from the Germans, and then by a German writing in Latin—that the name acquired this form. So, unlike the Scandinavians, they were in fact federates of the Veringi—and not just any federates, but of the great Rome, which had not yet lost most of its splendour and glory. And this status was so honourable that it could well have been turned into the name of a people: 'Look, you savages from the marshes and thickets, we are not like you; we are federates, we are the Weringians, we serve the great Rome!'

At the very least, this would have been more reasonable than the strange version according to which the Scandinavians received their name from the Slavs based on a status they had acquired in a third country, the route to which lay through Slavic lands…

The land of the Danubian Rugians-Russians left its mark in a whole cluster of place-names and personal names derived from the word 'Rus, Russian'. Documents from the era of Charlemagne

mention ‘Rus Mark’ in the same location. It is interesting that the Rugians’ closest neighbours and kinsmen – the Obodrites – also left their mark on the Danube, in precisely the same places. And in the Russian chronicles, certain ‘Danube Varangians’ make brief appearances.

The most famous Rugian-Rus of that time must undoubtedly be considered Odoacer. A figure, it must be said, who is also quite enigmatic – no less so than, say, the Huns. What names the sources do not give him! He is described as the grandson of that very same Croco, as a man of no known parentage, and as the son of a chieftain. He is called a Goth (well, that’s understandable; he served in Gothic units, so he must be a Goth), a ‘Herul from the island of Rügen’, and a Skiri. The Skiri themselves were a strange people. They lived somewhere near the Venedi and played a significant role in Attila’s empire. Roman sources refer to them – naturally! – as ‘Germans’, and historians dutifully repeat this. I, for one, will not repeat for the third time what ‘Germans’ meant in the mouths of Roman historians, nor how much weight this designation carries. The Skiri chieftain Ediko was a close associate of Attila and led the Hun ruler’s embassy to Constantinople. Travelling with him in the embassy was a Roman in Hun service – yes, such characters did exist – named Orestes. After Attila’s death and the collapse of his short-lived empire, the Ostrogothic chieftain Theodomir routed the Skiri and killed Yediko. The Skiri never recovered from this defeat. They never again appeared on the historical stage.

*Odoacer’s coin*

Jordan, however, refers to Odoacer as a Rugian. Perhaps the Skiri were one of the Rugian tribes? Odoacer came from his native lands to the province of Noricum – or, more precisely, to the kingdom of the Rus.

There he met the hermit Severinus – his hagiography remains one of the primary sources on the Kingdom of the Rus. The hermit enjoyed great popularity in the province and even exerted influence over the King of the Rus, who had long held real power in Noricum. Moreover, Severinus was also held in high regard by the Rugians’ neighbour, the staunch pagan King Hilbud of the Alemanni. However, Severinus did not use his fame to further his faith – there is no mention of him attempting to convert the king, who often heeded his advice, or the royal nobleman whose son he had healed. It is therefore not entirely clear for what merits Severin is honoured as the ‘Apostle of the Rugians’. Among the examples of the saint’s foresight, his hagiography also recounts the story of his encounter with a young Odoacer. The young giant came to the elder, renowned for his prophecies, to learn of his fate. Clothed in garments sewn from animal skins, he nearly knocked the low ceiling of the hermit’s cell off with his head. The hermit predicted that, upon travelling to Italy, he would become famous and rise to become a great ruler. The prophecy came true. When Odoacer arrived in Italy with his men, Rome—or rather Ravenna, to which the government of the dying empire had moved from the capital ravaged by the Goths and Vandals—was ruled on behalf of the patrician Orestes, whom he had proclaimed emperor: the very same man who had once served Attila and travelled to Constantinople as an ambassador alongside the Scyrian Edico. Before long, Odoacer became commander of Orestes’s forces – and then led a mutiny of soldiers dissatisfied with their ruler. Orestes was killed, and his young son, Romulus Augustulus, soon abdicated the throne. Odoacer did not clothe yet another puppet in the imperial regalia, nor did he don them himself. He effectively

‘shut down’ the Western Roman Empire by sending the regalia to Constantinople, to Emperor

Zeno. The Orthodox ruler thanked the barbarian for his generous gift by setting against him the leader of the Ostrogoths, Theodoric, who had been brought up in Constantinople and was the son of Theodomir, who had defeated the Scyrians. The war lasted a long time, until Odoacer was treacherously killed at a banquet in honour of
'reconciliation'.

*Here, Odoacer is not often depicted, but in the West this subject was very popular even over a hundred years ago. Odoacer and Severin*

*Odoacer and his warriors*

*Odoacer accepts the abdication of Romulus Augustulus*

The most interesting thing is that, by all accounts, Odoacer was remembered in Rus'. Seven centuries after his death, a Novgorod chronicler, recounting the capture of Tsargrad by the Crusaders, specifically noted that their leader was from 'Bern' (Verona), specifically noting – 'where the wicked pagan Diedrich was' – that is, Dietrich, as Theodoric was called in German songs and legends. The Novgorod chronicler had no other reason to hate the long-dead leader of the Ostrogoths so much apart from the murder of his fellow tribesman Odoacer. It is interesting to note the fleeting nature of the mention – apparently, the 'wicked, heathen Didrech' and his misdeed were well known to potential readers – the chronicler's fellow countrymen and contemporaries.

Bogdan Khmelnitsky reminded his Zaporozhian Cossack warriors of 'Prince Odonatser', who had taken Rome at the head of the Rus' 'from Rugia, from the Baltic or German Pomerania', in a speech comparing

The hetman's scribe, Samiilo Zirka, would later compare Bogdan to the 'ancient Rus' Odonacer.

It is precisely for this reason – and by no means simply because I felt like it or found it more interesting – that I preferred Jordanes' account of Odoacer the Rugian.

Theodoric was also remembered in Varangian Rus', through which the memory of Odoacer and his demise might have reached the lands of Novgorod and Kyiv Rus'. A folk legend placed him at the head of the midnight Wild Hunt of the damned souls. The Slavophile Khomyakov drew attention to this in his book *Semiramis*.

The Germanic peoples also remembered Theodoric's enmity with the Rus'. The 'Tidrek Saga' has survived, recounting the wars waged, on the one hand, by the kings of the Goths and Huns, and on the other, by the leaders of the Rus' and the 'Viltins' – that is, the Vils, the Velets[8] . From this last detail, we can determine when this tradition took shape. The fact is that in the 10th century, the Veli began to be called the Lutici. The former name very quickly supplanted the old one. As early as 1872, Fortinsky noted that the German chronicler of the early 11th century, Thitmar of Merseburg, uses the word 'Vele' only in quotations from earlier chroniclers; when writing in his own words, however, he speaks only of the 'Lutichi'. In the French 'Song of Roland', for instance, although it deals with the times of Charlemagne (who did indeed wage war against the Veleti, as we shall discuss later), it specifically mentions 'the Leutich (leutiz) of Dapamore'. From this, one may conclude that the song was composed after Charlemagne's time. In the saga, by contrast, the text refers only to 'Viltins' and nowhere to 'Leutichs'. This means it was composed no earlier than the beginning of the 11th century.

And here is what is curious – if Attila (whose domain, curiously, is placed somewhere in Frisia in the saga) and Theodoric (Theodoric) of Bern, then on the Rus' side, apart from Ozantrix (in whom Odoacer is sometimes recognised), there are King Valdemar and his chief warrior Ilias (Ilya) the Rus'. It is traditionally believed that they found their way into the saga from Rus' epics supposedly associated with Vladimir the Baptist. But if, as we have seen, the saga could not have been composed later than the early 11th century, what influence could the epics about the Baptist possibly have had? At the time the saga was composed, the Baptist was either a living contemporary or a recent deceased figure. It is absolutely impossible to portray him in the saga as a contemporary of Attila. It follows, then, that we are talking about a completely different Vladimir – or even a different Rus'. All the more so given that THIS Rus' borders on the Viltins-Velets – and, at the same time, on the Italian territories of Tidrek-Theodoric. Could this be the Danubian kingdom of the Rus'-Rugians before us? The opening of the saga also suggests this: 'This saga begins in Apulia and proceeds northwards through Lombardy and Venice to Swabia, Hungary, *Rus*, Windland, Denmark…' As we can see, the 'Rus' of the saga lies between Hungary and Windland – the lands of the Polabian Slavs. But even in our own bylina, a fact to which little attention is paid, Kyiv, where Prince Vladimir Krasno Solnyshko reigns, stands on the Danube, not the Dnieper. Incidentally, I have devoted a separate book to the bylina, which has already seen two editions.

But perhaps no less instructive for our topic are those passages of the saga that relate not to the conflict between Vladimir Krasno Solnyshko and Ilya Attila and Theodoric, but to

8 There is also mention of the 'Pulin'—the Polans or Poles—but, unlike the Rus and the Viltians, they do not play an active role; it is merely stated that they are neighbours and close kin to both groups.

the people of the Viltins or Vilkins. At the beginning of the saga, it is recounted how King Viltin (or Vilkin), the eponym[9] – the progenitor of the Vilt-giants – conquered Svitjöd (Sweden, or more precisely, the land of the Svios) and Gotland (the island of Gotland), 'the entire kingdom of the Swedish konung' (remember, the saga is ***Swedish***!), Scania (Skåne, a region in the south of modern Sweden), Skaland (it is unlikely that this refers to the village of the same name in the north of modern Norway, but I dare not say exactly what it is), Jutland (Jutland, Denmark), Vinland (in this case, of course, this is not the 'land of grapes' discovered on the other side of the Atlantic by Leif the Lucky, but the land of the Wends, the Polabian Slavs). The picture, needless to say, is quite astonishing – a stranger, neither a Scandinavian nor even a Germanic, is credited with quite astonishing conquests in the Scandinavian lands. Even if one makes allowances for the fact that we are talking more about raids than conquest in the modern sense – it is still astonishing. Although archaeologically the presence of Slavs has been recorded in practically all the lands listed – ranging from a significant proportion of pottery in settlements to fortresses of specifically Slavic construction – it is true that all these date from later periods than the times of Attila and even Theodoric.

Incidentally, the Slavs also have legends about a successful war against the inhabitants of the 'Danomalkhian' (i.e. Danemark, Danish) islands. These were preserved by the Polish chronicler Kadłubek, who, naturally, attributed the victory to his own people, who never shared a border with the Danes and, for that reason alone, could not have waged war against them. A curious legend has grown out of vague memories of a long-ago victory – supposedly the long, 'feminine' hair of the Danes was forced upon the victorious Slavs as a sign of defeat. This reflected the attitude of the Wends, who traditionally cut their hair and beards short or shaved them off entirely, towards the hairstyles of the Scandinavians – for whom, on the contrary, long hair was a sign of high birth, whilst a cropped, let alone shaved, head was the mark of a beggar, if not a slave.

Let us return, however, for the time being, to the exploits of the giants. I do not know how things stood with the conquest of Sweden or Gotland, but in the Netherlands, for instance, their presence had a very tangible impact. The same Venerable Bede reports that around the year 700, the Frankish mayor of the palace, Pepin – the de facto ruler of the country and ancestor of Charlemagne – granted to Willibrord, as the seat of his diocese, a town in the land of the Frisians, which had only just been subjugated by fire and sword to the crucified God and the Frankish king. This town was called Viltburg, that is, as the Venerable Bede notes, the town of the Vilt people. In the language of the Gauls, the Anglo-Saxon cleric continues, that town was called Trajectum. Today it is better known as Utrecht.

That is to say, as early as the 7th century, the giant Vilt people had settled so firmly in the lands of what would become Holland that they even had their own towns amongst the Frisian settlements.

9 An eponym is a hero who lends his name to a people, a city, a caste, and so on. Well-known eponyms include Shem, Canaan, Judah and Israel from biblical myths; Danaos and Hellas from Greek mythology; Irmin and Saxonot from Germanic legends; and Sloven, Czech, Lech and Rus from Slavic legends.

*Beda the Venerable*

The later ‘Utrecht Chronicler’ provides a far more comprehensive and vivid account of the giants’ presence in his land. It turns out, he reports, that the Veli, together with the Saxons and Frisians, formed a kind of supra-tribal alliance, lived in peace, elected common leaders, and Viltburg – Viltenburg in the ‘Utrecht Chronicle’ – was their common capital. The manuscript of the ‘Utrecht Chronicler’ dates from the fifteenth century – but by that time the Veleti had long since passed into history, and the name itself, in that form, as I have already mentioned, had not been in use for half a thousand years. So it is unlikely that its ‘Slavic’ information is the invention of a later author. He also states that Flerdingen was once, before the Frankish conquest, called Slavenburg. As in Mecklenburg, place-names point to the presence of Slavs in the lands of Holland. There are noticeably fewer of them here, but they do exist – Svyato, Kamen, Vodenitsy, and so on. Perhaps the popular Dutch surnames van der Vilt and van der Velt are also a reminder of those times. The alliance between the Geats and the Saxons apparently began earlier than that with the Frisians. At the very least, the ‘Utrecht Chronicle’ mentions Slavs in the retinues of Hengest and Horsa, the Anglo-Saxon conquerors of Britain. Gilferding believed that the county of Wiltshire and the town of Wilton are evidence of the penetration of the Slavic Veleites into Britain. Both are located in the south-west of England, and their names have been known since at least the 8th century. It is interesting to note that it was precisely in these parts that the eventful life of King Arthur and his companions unfolded – naturally, they must have fought against the Saxon invaders and their Velet allies. It would be interesting to find out which of the anti-heroes in the Arthurian cycle of legends has Slavic roots – but that is impossible to ascertain now. However, if one were to look, it would surely be among the giants. Both Frankish songs and the saga depict the Veleats as giants;

in fact, ‘velet’ or ‘volot’ in Slavic means ‘giant’.

The Slavophile A.S. Khomyakov and the Soviet scholar V.V. Mavrodin, separated by a span of almost a hundred years, wrote about certain Slavic burials in England, but I have been unable to ascertain what these burials were or why they were considered Slavic. The Saxons also revered the thoroughly Slavic Zernebock – that is, Chernobog. This is written about not only by the writer Walter Scott (hardly anyone who has read the novel *Ivanhoe* will forget the mad Saxon woman Ulrica, calling upon the dark God of the ancestors to fall upon the heads of the enslavers), but also by the quite respectable historian Sharon Turner.

Procopius of Caesarea recounts the campaigns of the Varni into Britain. Indeed, according to his account, it was this tribe that ruled in those days ‘from the River Istra to the Northern Ocean (of course, here, as in the case of Attila, the Baltic Sea is implied, also known as the Venedian Gulf)’. Procopius notes a very unusual custom among the Varni, namely that the ruler’s heir, in order to inherit the throne, was obliged to marry his stepmother. The Germans had no such custom, and the daughter of the Anglo-Saxon chieftain, when her fiancé Radigis (could this be a reference to the youth of Radagaisus-Radegast?) married her stepmother, felt insulted, which served as the cause of war between the Angles and the Varni. Incidentally, Helmod would later mention the former greatness of the Wagrs, who had subjugated both the Obodrites and the land of the Velet tribe of the Khizans or Kichans, and ventured further afield – is there not some confusion here; did he not confuse the Wagrs with the Varni due to the similarity in sound, given that both tribes later joined the tribal confederation of the Obodrites and Rerici? In any case, there is evidence of the power and influence of the Varni; no source other than Helmold mentions the greatness of the Wagrs.

There is another Saxon-Slavic deity. Conrad Boto, in his ‘Saxon Chronicle’, tells of a Slavic god who was, however, worshipped in the Saxon town of Gotslar. The god was called Kredo; in one hand his idol held a horn filled with fruit, in the other a six-spoked wheel, and a fish was depicted beneath his feet. It is now difficult to say what kind of god this was. He has been compared to the Russian Rod, to the Horutan Kurt, and to the word ‘krada’ – a funeral pyre. Today, this ancient god is part of the local ‘brand’; tourists visiting Goslar have their photographs taken with people in traditional costume portraying Kredo or beside a sculpture depicting his idol. More interesting, however, is something else. Namely, the altar of the Slavic god, which the Franks solemnly carried into the church as a trophy, where it lay quietly and peacefully until the 19th century, when it was handed over to the museum. It remains in the museum to this day. Only the gods know why, it is dated to the first half of the 12th century, even though the Saxon lands had already come under the rule of the Christian Franks during the reign of Charlemagne, and it seems highly unlikely that three hundred years later, in one of the centres of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, anyone would have made an altar to a pagan god – and a Slavic one at that.

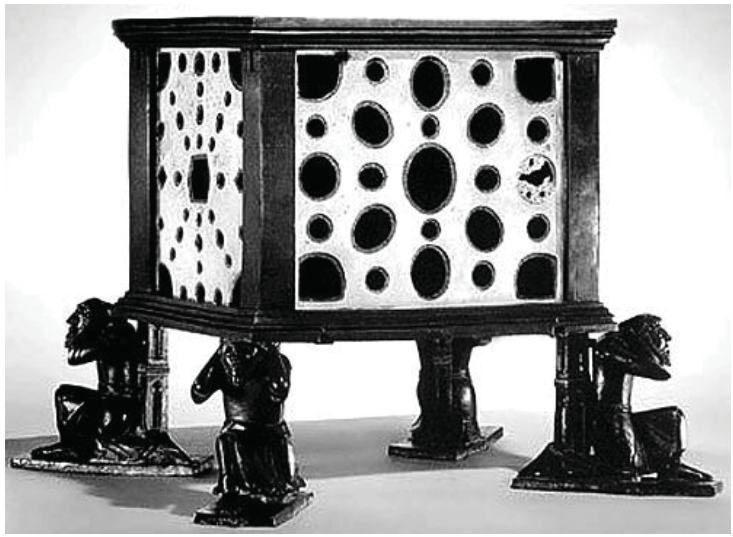
The altar itself is striking. We are accustomed to imagining the Slavs’ pagan cult as roughly hewn stones or logs, and to regard the Zbruch idol as the pinnacle of pagan art – perhaps full of profound cosmogonic meaning, but hardly capable of ‘appearing alive’ – as, according to reports by German preachers who had seen the shrines of Rügen-Rügen, Volhynia, Szczecin and Radigost, the images covering the temples of Varangian Rus’ appeared to do. Here, however, we see the finest craftsmanship; we can make out the folds in the clothing and the strands of hair in the hairstyles of the figures supporting the altar – judging by their beards, long hair and long-tailed robes, they are depicted as pagan priests. What we see in museums are, for the most part, idols that have survived on the periphery, in places where there were known to be no skilled craftsmen. It would be nice if, when speaking of Slavic pagan art, people were to present not these, but – well, at least that same altar of Krod. After all, when people speak of Orthodox art, they certainly do not mean crucifixes cast by village craftsmen with gaunt, big-headed figures; no, they mean Dionysius or Rublev. Would it not be fair to judge pagan art by its highest manifestations, rather than its lowest?

*Krodo from the 'Saxon Chronicle'*

*And this monster is supposedly Krod too*

*Krodo – a tourist brand from Götzlar*

*And yet another tourist attraction on the same theme*



*The Crodus altar in the Götzlar Museum*

*Figures of priests supporting the altar*

Anyway, let's get back to the saga of Tidrek and the Viltians.

According to this saga, King Viltin was not only a mighty conqueror, but also Velund's grandfather. Some know this character as Vilanda from Kipling's stories, others from Semenova's novella 'The Lame Blacksmith' (in which the gloomy, bloody and vengeful nature of the epic blacksmith is, as usual, mercilessly sentimentalised[10]), in passing

10 Perhaps only Maria Vasilyevna could have turned a surly character—who once split a rival blacksmith in two, merely to demonstrate the capabilities of the blade he had forged—into a sensitive soul, an opponent of war and almost a pacifist.

He was mentioned in the old TV series ‘Robin of Sherwood’ as the creator of seven magic swords. A magical blacksmith-hero, he came to be revered as the patron of the blacksmith’s trade in general, the blacksmith of the gods and the god of blacksmiths. Subsequently, evidently due to the German blacksmiths’ *great devotion* to the new faith, Christians made the name of their patron one of the names of the devil – as Woland. This name appears briefly in Goethe’s work and gains worldwide fame in Bulgakov’s novel – but in that Voland there is nothing left of his predecessor except the name, of German origin – ‘perhaps a German’ – and a limp.

*This Saxon casket depicts, according to researchers’ assumptions, Velund*

In short, Velund was incredibly cool, and the fact that Norse legend makes him the grandson of the progenitor of the giants is quite impressive testimony to the respect held for the latter. Or perhaps it is a high estimation of their craftsmanship[11] .

I do not know to what extent this is linked to the fact that, in the 6th–8th centuries, a very vibrant and distinctive culture flourished on the shores of the Baltic and North Seas, which has gone down in history as the Wendel culture. Its centre was the Wendel region in Sweden. The name is quite telling – a worthy counterpart to the Dutch Viltburg and the English Wiltshire. Researchers speculate about Celtic and Sarmatian influences, about some sort of ‘impulse from the south’… in short, they go to every conceivable and inconceivable length to avoid uttering that dreadful, nasty, unscientific word beginning with the letter ‘S’. No, not that one. And not that one either. Worse. S… sl… Slav… Slavic… well, you get the picture.

But we’ll have to.

By the time Wendel art appeared, the Celts had already disappeared from Central Europe. Instead, the direct successors of the Celts in art and cult were the Baltic Slavs.

The Sarmatians had no access whatsoever, not only to Scandinavia but not even to the Baltic Sea. Only via the lands of the Venedi – and even those who are very, well, downright passionate about denying the Slavic origins of the Venedi in the 6th–8th centuries cannot do so.

Finally, from the south – well, once again, there is simply no way round the Slavic lands lying strictly to the south of Sweden.

It’s just a bit of a mess.

Oh, and one more thing. The motif of a warrior with a bird of prey is very common in Wendish art

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11 It is interesting that the neighbours and kinsmen of the Varna giants were considered skilled blacksmiths and armourers. That very ruler, King Theodoric, took tribute from the Varna in the form of swords – just like the Khazars from the Polans in the chronicle tradition.

on the helmet. There are also some with boars, but they are actually quite well known in Scandinavia, and 'Beowulf' speaks of 'boars on the enemy's helmet', and archaeologists have found quite a few such examples. But there are no birds on helmets – neither in Scandinavian legends nor among archaeological finds. Now, on the idol of Svarozhich in Retre-Radogosch, the sanctuary of the giants (which you, the reader, may have seen at least in Konstantin Vasilyev's painting, for some reason titled 'Sventovit', but depicting Svarozhich specifically), there is in fact a bird of prey on the helmet.

There is also another trace of contact between the Scandinavians and the Slavs at a fairly early date.

Among the list of representatives of the Swedish-Norwegian royal house of the Ynglings, there is a rather curious name, namely Visbur.

Commentators on this period (A.Y. Gurevich, A.A. Khlevov) make no mention of this name, focusing instead on the fate of the konung who bore it. Meanwhile, the name itself carries some historical significance.

*Vendeli warriors in Svarozhich-style helmets*

The fact is that the name Visbur is completely foreign to Scandinavian onomastics. It is not found among the Normans of the Viking Age, neither in its entirety nor in its constituent parts.

If we turn to the text of the Ynglinga Saga itself, we learn that Visbur's mother was a foreigner, the Finn Driva, daughter of Snjara the Elder, king of the Finns. However, this whole story cannot be taken at face value. The fact is that the 'Finnish' names in the story of Visbur – Visbur's mother, her father, and their court sorceress Huld – are not Finnish but Scandinavian, and are not proper names but meaningful nicknames: Driva – Blizzard, Snjar – Snow, Huld – Cold. Thus, Visbur turns out to be almost the son of the Snow Maiden and the grandson of Father Frost.

It seems clear that this whole story was invented, if not by Snorri Sturluson, who recorded the saga, then by the storytellers who recounted it before him. ('The author undoubtedly regarded the *List of the Inglings* as a wholly reliable source. Nevertheless, he apparently considered himself entitled to expand the information provided by Thjódolv regarding a particular event into a detailed account of what, in the narrator's opinion, must have led to that event, psychologically justifying it and accepting the plausibility of his invention as factual truth' – writes a scholarly commentator on Snorri Sturluson.) What is reliably established

is Visbur's foreign origin.

One need not search long for the region from which Visbur's mother actually hailed. Whilst the name Visbur, with the exception of this instance, does indeed not appear in Scandinavian sources, its components do nevertheless crop up: the first part in the name Visvald, the second in the names Burisleif, ***Rettibur*** and ***Unibur***. All these names, though they appear in Norwegian and Icelandic sagas, are not Scandinavian. The bearer of the first – a suitor for the hand of the Norwegian queen 'from Gardariki', i.e. from Rus' – is usually seen as a variant of the Slavic Vsevolod. The second, Burisleif – Borislav, Boris – is also a native of Gardariki, the brother and rival of Jarislæf (Yaroslav the Wise) from the saga of Eymund. Rettibur is the 'king of the Wends', and Unibur is his commander. These names are usually rendered as Ratibor and Unebor.

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the Old Norse konung was in fact called Vsebor (a name still in use among the Western Slavs as late as the 17th century), or *Vyshebor (a similar change occurred during the Germanisation of the Slavic name Vismara – Vyshemir)[12] . There is nothing supernatural about the appearance of a Slavic name in the list of Scandinavian kings; after all, Jordanes noted as early as the 6th century 'how customary it is for tribes to adopt names for the most part: the Romans take Macedonian names, the Greeks take Roman names, and the Sarmatians take Germanic names. The Goths, for their part, predominantly borrow Hun names". However, the very fact of contact between the Scandinavians and the Slavs (presumably the Balts) is interesting, especially as this contact was, first of all, very early. In any case, in the 'List of the Inglings', the skald Thiodolv of Visby appears as *an ancestor* of Olav Alva, whose existence during the Great Migration has been archaeologically attested. Secondly, contacts between the Scandinavians and the Baltic Slavs—the Wends—appear to have been entirely on an equal footing; otherwise, the future ruler of the country would surely not have been given a foreign name. For this to happen, the name would have had to be considered by the Scandinavians as worthy of a leader, which means that the people from whom the name was borrowed must have been regarded, at the very least, as equals.

Naturally, unlike the Normanists, who draw sweeping conclusions from the *possible* Scandinavian etymology of a few names of Russian princes, we shall not, on the basis of the *obvious* Slavic etymology of the Old Norse konung's name, speak of the Slavic origin of the dynasty. But the very fact that a Slavic name appears in the list of Swedish rulers serves as further evidence of an early and, in all likelihood, significant Slavic presence in the Baltic region.

There is another mention of the Baltic Slavs, not in epics or legends, but in entirely serious historical documents. In the late 6th – early 7th century, Theophylact Simocatta, a writer and scholar from the Eastern Roman Empire, recounted in the pages of his
'History' of such a strange incident:

'The following day, three men from the Slavic tribe, possessing no iron weapons or any military equipment, were taken prisoner by the emperor's bodyguards. They had only lyres with them, and carried nothing else. The Emperor (Mauricius the Strategos, known, incidentally, for his treatise on methods of waging war against the neighbours of Eastern Rome, including the Slavs and the Ants. – *L.P.*) began to question them as to which tribe they belonged to, where fate had destined them to live, and for what reason they found themselves within the Roman borders. They replied that they were Slavs by tribe, that they lived on the edge of the Western Ocean (and here again, by 'ocean' one must understand the Baltic. – *L.P.*), and that the khagan (the Avar khagan, who at that time controlled almost all of Central Europe. – *L.P.*) had sent envoys to them to gather a military force, and had sent honourable gifts to their tribal leaders. They accepted the gifts, but refused to provide him with allied assistance, insisting that the great distance made this difficult for them. And they were sent to the khagan as hostages, as it were, to prove that

12 Incidentally, in later saga accounts, Velund is also described as a 'Finn' – evidently, in both cases the Finns replace the Viltians-Velians and the Wends as the people inhabiting the eastern 'edge of the earth'. In the days of Visbur and Velund, the Scandinavians knew nothing of the lands east of the Wends; during the Viking Age, they learnt that beyond the Wends lay the land of the Finns, and its inhabitants replaced their former eastern neighbours in the sagas.

that this journey lasts fifteen months. But the khagan, having forgotten all the laws regarding ambassadors, decided to cause them all manner of difficulties on their return. They had heard, they said, that the Roman people, both in wealth and in humanity, are, so to speak, the most renowned; therefore, having deceived [the khagan], they chose a favourable moment and withdrew to Thrace. They carry lyres because they are not accustomed to cladding their bodies in iron armour – their country knows no iron, and so their life passes peacefully and without strife, for they play the lyre, since they are not trained to blow the trumpet. For those to whom war is an unknown thing, they said, it is natural to devote themselves more earnestly to musical pursuits. Having heard their tales, the emperor was filled with admiration for their tribe, and he granted a gracious reception and hospitality to these very barbarians who had fallen into his hands. Marvelling at the size of their bodies and the beauty of their features, he sent them to Heraclea.'

This story gave rise to a wide variety of interpretations. Some concluded, quite seriously, that the Slavs had not yet emerged from the Stone Age by that time. Moreover, it was not German Slavophobes who wrote of this, but the Slavs themselves who often wrote of it. For example, Józef Kraszewski in his novel *An Ancient Legend*, on which Jerzy Hoffman recently based his film *When the Sun Was a God*, vividly portrayed a shrewd German pedlar selling metal objects—supposedly created by magical gnomes—to naive Slavs, and the elder Visha, who kept his great-grandfathers' stone axes in a place of honour and grumbled about the new-fangled iron trinkets. Others, particularly the Slavophiles, found yet another pretext to pontificate on the very 'meek and peace-loving' nature of the Slavs. Still others suspected the Slavs' speeches of harbouring the cunning of spies (the writer Finzhgar in his book *Under the Sun of Freedom*, for instance). But it is unlikely that the Slavs could have hoped to outwit the most experienced schemers of Eastern Rome with such a childish fairy tale. Finally, a theory was put forward that the Slavs had said nothing of the sort, and that Theophylact had simply reproduced the utopian image of 'noble savages' living in a happy golden age. Well, with that sort of approach, one could break down
'quotes' and 'motifs', leaving not a single living part of it intact. Some people might like that – but not me, dear reader. I suspect you won't either, since you've picked up this book.

The correct approach here, I believe, was indicated by Hilferding. On this occasion, Alexander Fedorovich did not wax philosophical about the kindness and meekness of the Slavs (you and I, reader, have already marvelled at this 'meekness' on more than one occasion), but suggested that the envoys of whom Theophylact wrote were 'magicians', priests. And Theophylact, it follows, mistook the customs of a caste for those of a people (incidentally, this was not an uncommon phenomenon – medieval authors, including Russian ones, regarded Indian Brahmins as a separate people, 'Rahmans'). Indeed, among a number of European peoples there existed a custom forbidding priests from touching iron. And playing the gusli had, since ancient times, been an integral part of pagan ritual, for which it was met with fierce hostility from Christian clergy. It was equally common for priests to serve as diplomats – the Druids, for instance, played such a role among the Celts, and as we recall, the Celts exerted a considerable influence on the religion of Varangian Rus'. In Christianised Rus', Christian priests often served as ambassadors.

*The gusli and gusli players of Rus*

Thus, from the very earliest times, almost immediately after appearing in the chronicles, the inhabitants of Varangian Rus' were familiar with both military druzhinas and the priesthood.

Which of the tribal principalities of Varangian Pomorye sent these sorcerer-envoys on their way? It is, of course, impossible to say for certain – but there is evidence that may serve as a clue. The Syrian author Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor, who wrote in the same years as Simocatta, or slightly later, tells of a people living far beyond the Alano-Turkic steppe. This people were of gigantic stature (remember – 'marvelling at *the size of their* bodies') and they 'had no weapons' ('were not accustomed to cladding their bodies in iron armour'). This people are called 'Rus'. And since we are talking about life 'on the edge of the Western Ocean', we must assume that Rügen, the island of the Rus, was already a prominent priestly centre at that time.

And now I shall begin with an account of the event that brought the legendary period of the history of Slavic Atlantis to a close, marking the beginning of its, alas, short-lived heyday. I am referring to the so-called Battle of Bravall.

It is dated variously – from the 5th to the 8th centuries AD – making its heroes either contemporaries of Sigurd Fafnibani, 'the Slayer of Fafnir', Siegfried of the 'Nibelungenlied', and the Gyukungs, slain by Attila the Hun, or older contemporaries of Ragnar Lodbrok, the great Viking chieftain. I prefer to err on the side of the golden mean – the late 7th to early 8th century.

It was ruled by King Harald Boezub [(13)] –in old books, the nickname is not translated and is left as Hilde Tand) and his nephew Sigurd Ring, ruler of the Swedes.

It was under Harald that the Danish tribes crossed over from the islands to the mainland, displacing the Jutes, Angles and Saxons. But before that, many interesting events took place in his life, and his entire existence was, in one way or another, intertwined with Varangian Rus' and the Slavs.

His father, Hrerik the Ring-Thrower of the Skjoldung clan, was killed by Ivar the Wide-Embracing, king of Scania – a region in the south of present-day Sweden, which at that time was not subject to the Swedish rulers. His embrace was indeed broad… and strong – Ivar captured Uppsala, killing Ingiald the Cunning of the Ingling dynasty, and plundered in England and along the Eastern Trade Route. Harald's father did not escape those deadly embraces either – even though Hreirk was Ivar's son-in-law. His own daughter, Aud, fled from Ivar with little Harald, first to Gotland, and then… well, that 'then' is where it gets interesting. The sagas tell us that the widow with her infant

13 According to one version, the king was so named because he had protruding teeth; according to another, 'battle tooth' or 'battle fang' is simply an allegorical name, a kenning for the hero.

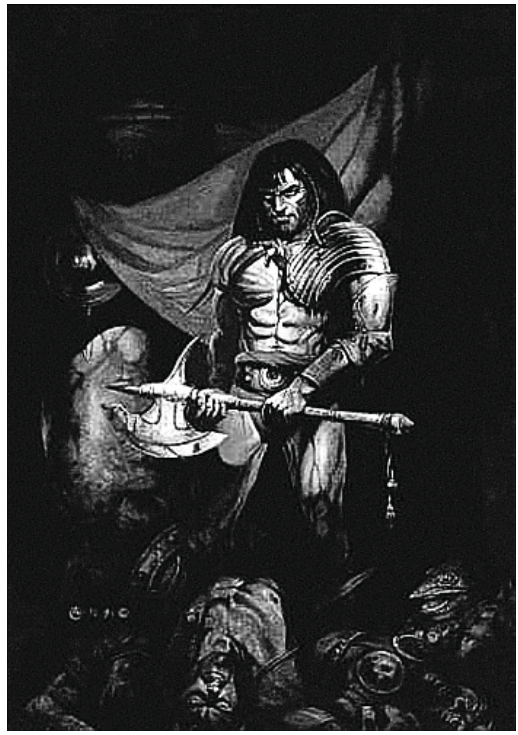
took refuge from her father in Gardar, or even in Holmgard, as the Scandinavians would later come to call Novgorod. But might there not have been an inadvertent mix-up here too, as with Velund and Visbur? Might the saga not have been referring to the Baltic Rus' from the island – 'Holma' – Rügen? Novgorod, however, certainly did not exist at that time. In any case, the next husband of the widowed queen was a 'Gardian', a Rus' prince, with the clearly non-Scandinavian name 'Radbard'. S.V. Alekseev believes that this is how the Norman storytellers reworked the Slavic name Ratbor. Some researchers attribute the founding of Ladoga specifically to him. Auda bore Ratbor a son – 'Randver', Ratmer.

At this time, Ivar learned of the hiding place of his rebellious daughter. Apparently fearing that the young exile would find supporters among the Danish nobility, Ivar set sail eastwards with a vast fleet assembled from all his subject lands. The Swedes, Sconians, Jutes and Danes marched under his banners. But… according to some sources, a storm arose, and the fleet assembled by Ivar the Wide-Embracing sank along with the konung. According to another version, the battle did take place, and Ivar was defeated by the Rus. With Ratbor's blessing, Harald set off westwards, to the lands of his father and grandfather. He was recognised (which leads me to believe that his stepfather accompanied his stepson not only with kind words of advice, but also with a strong retinue) first on Gotland and the islands of Sjælland, then in Skåne, the domain of his treacherous grandfather, and then in his father's lands.

He was also recognised by his Obodrite neighbours – according to Saxo Grammaticus, two Slavic princes, Dal and Duk· entered his service[14] In general, the Danes' relations with the peoples of Varangian Rus' were somewhat ambiguous. There was a legendary hero in Denmark named Starkad. He was descended from mountain giants, and he was born a monster – with six arms and fangs protruding from his mouth. Thor, the god of thunder, who hated giants,

'refined' his appearance, knocking out his fangs and tearing off the extra pairs of arms. There is no room here to recount his exploits, adventures and misfortunes – like any normal epic hero, Starkad's fate is tragic. We are interested in something else – on the one hand, Starkad was friends with a certain Vin (Vind, a Slav, most likely an Obodrite), but at the same time, according to Saxo Grammaticus, he fought 'in Poland' against an enemy named Vilce – that is, again a Vilce, a Lutich. It was no coincidence that the clash with him was attributed to Poland – our chronicle also classifies the descendants of the Velets and Lutichs as 'Lachians'. Some explain this by the fact that the Lyutichs were at one time under the rule of the Polish crown (though this does not apply to the Velets at all), others by the fact that the Lyutichs were closer in origin to the Poles than to the other peoples of Varangian Rus'. The Varni, the Rugians-Rus and their neighbours and kinsmen from the Obodrite tribal confederation were bearers of the so-called Sukovo-Dzedzitsa archaeological culture, whilst the Velets were bearers of the Feldberg culture, which, like the material culture of the ancestors of the Poles, traces its origins back to the 'Praga-Korchak' archaeological culture. In particular, the people of the Sukovo-Dzedzitsa culture used moulded pottery, whilst the Feldberg Velets were already using a potter's wheel. The Sukovo-Dzedzitsa people lived in small settlements with a clustered layout, consisting exclusively of above-ground log-type structures. The Velets preferred large fortified settlements.

14 S.V. Alekseev sees in this name a re-vocalisation of the name Tug – either in its full form or as an abbreviation of names such as Tugarin or Tugomir. I find S.V. Tsvetkov's view more convincing; he compared the name of the Obodrite prince with that of the hero of Russian epic tales, Duka.



*Starkad. Drawing by contemporary artist Chris Achilleos*

Harald also conquered a certain Reidgotia. In the legends about his reign, Reidgotia is described as a land neighbouring Vindland (the lands of the Wends), and the Wends' dependence on Reidgotia is emphasised. Historians have put forward a host of theories, ranging from Jutland – which was all too familiar to Harald Toothpick, and the conquest of which was hardly heroic – to the Crimean (!!!) Goths, whom the Danish king was just as unlikely to have conquered as, say, the Emirate of Córdoba. No other Goths were observed at that time south of Harald Toothless's domains. Here again, Gilferding's interpretation strikes me as the most likely – Alexander Fomich suggests that Reidgothia was the largest cult centre of the Radigost giants (Riedigost in Latin chronicles), whose sanctity, despite constant strife with the giants, was recognised even by the Odrians.

Years passed; Harald's younger half-brother, 'Randver'—Ratmer—grew up, and he too could not settle in his father's home, setting off for the West, 'the land of the whales', as his mother's relatives put it. Whether out of gratitude for his stepfather's help or for other reasons, Harald tolerated the young Slav's settlement in the land of the Svear. There he married Asa, the daughter of Harald Redbeard, the konung of one of the Norwegian tribes. A few years later, Asa bore her husband an heir, who was named, as was the custom in the north, after a relative of his wife: Sigurd. In time, he became known as Sigurd the Ring.

He had grown up and become a warrior when he was killed on one of his father's campaigns into the land of the Frisians

father.

And Harald seized his nephew's lands, gathering in one hand all that his

his wide embrace. Why did Harald treat his relative so harshly in his old age? Some legends say that the blame lay entirely with the machinations

of the sullen Starkad, who by that time had joined Sigurd's retinue: peace between the relatives was no joy to the descendant of the giants. Others maintain that it was precisely old age. Harald, by then an old man, dreaded the 'straw death' so despised by the Scandinavians
'straw death', sought war, and awaited death in battle – yet on the shores of the surrounding seas there remained few who would dare to stand against the force that the old Boezub had gathered under his command. Sigurd, the son of a Norwegian woman and a Slav, proved to be one of those few.

The armies met at Bravalla in East Götaland. The inhabitants of the northern lands remembered the monstrous slaughter for many centuries. 'It seemed as though the sky had fallen to the earth.' Thousands of ships, so the legends told, had gathered for battle. One could walk from Jutland to Sweden across Harald Toothpick's ships without getting one's feet wet. The sails of Sigurd's ships and those of his allies obscured the eastern horizon. Under the banners of Sigurd Kolt, the Swedes—Angl, Odd, Gunn, Ring, Sveno, Vinder, and others—took their stand; clearly, the stranger
'Randver'—Ratmer—that they resolutely stood up for his son's right to rule over them! There were also the Saxo-Nordalbingians here, led by Saxon Zanoza, Trondar Big Nose, and Rokar the Black. The Norwegians were there too, kinsmen of the northern konung's mother – Torquel the Stubborn, Gerd the Joyful and many others. From across the sea came the Rus led by 'Regnald'—Rogvolod, son of Ratbor's sister—whom some sagas describe as Sigurd's strongest warrior. Furthermore, as the 'Saga of the Skjeldungs' states, at least one Wendish chieftain deemed Harald Toothpick's cause unjust – Duke the Slav joined the ranks of the Danish ruler's opponents (it is possible that the chieftains with the familiar names of Krok and Mar came with him). The flanks were covered by light detachments of Estonians (it is unclear whether they were Prussian Aesti or Estonians) and Curonians (presumably, the names Keklu and Arvaki belong to some of them).

*The Battle of Bravalla through the eyes of artists from the beginning and end of the 19th century*

On Harald's side, the diversity of the troops was even greater.

In addition to the Danes and Jutes, his army included the Frisians led by Yubbe, the husband of Harald's sister and a renowned sorcerer, as well as the Angles of Orma and the Wends. There is also mention of certain warriors from Kenugard. Generally speaking, Kenugard would later be referred to as Kyiv in the Scandinavian sagas (it is also sometimes called 'Kyany' in the bylinas, whilst the city's inhabitants are regularly referred to as 'Kyanians' in the chronicles). But the people of Kyiv seemed to have no business on the Varangian Sea, either in the 7th or the 8th century. In those days, Kyiv was the capital of a not particularly large tribal principality of the Polans, who had enough to worry about with their immediate neighbours – those of the forests and the steppes. So who are we dealing with here? Are they the people named after the Polish tribe of the Kuyavians, due to a phonetic similarity? Or are they the very same Baltic Huns mentioned by the Venerable Bede – Adam of Bremen would later link the name 'Kunigard' specifically to the Huns?

Boats carrying the Livonians and Curonians sailed in from the eastern shores (the Swedes and Danes would later deeply regret having shown this tribe the way to their shores – though, as they say, that is a completely different story). From the west came detachments of British Celts.

In total, Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* lists 94 famous heroes in Sigurd's army. In his uncle's army, there are 60; the so-called *Fragment of the Saga* is somewhat more restrained, however, putting the number of celebrated warriors in the armies of the relatives at 60 and 40 respectively.

It is curious that among the Wends who fought for Harald Toothpick, three female warriors are mentioned. Two of them are referred to by Saxo as 'duchesses', which should most likely be understood as 'princesses'. The chief among them, Visna ('spring, youth'), bore the standard of the entire army of the aged Danish ruler. She was surrounded by the most devoted fighters – the berserkers[15]

15 It is striking that Saxon attributes the custom of throwing off one's shirt before rushing into battle specifically to Slavic warriors. Such behaviour, incidentally, was noted by Procopius of Caesarea as early as the sixth century among certain warriors of the Ants and Slavs.

Tokar, Toki (similar to the name of the boyar Tuka from our chronicles), Imi[16] . I would particularly like to highlight a character known as ‘Otrik, nicknamed the Youth’. It is quite clear that the young man called himself an ‘otrok’ (a young man), a member of his princess’s retinue – and translated this title, whilst his listeners understood the translation as a nickname. Thus, the young Slav has remained so through the centuries.

Another Slavic ‘duchess’ was called Hete – possibly Hot, meaning ‘the desired one’.

A third Slavic woman was given the Scandinavian name Vebjorg, ‘sacred mountain’. One is immediately reminded of the heroine Zlatogorka from our epic tales. However, the Scandinavians more often adapted foreign names to their own style (think of Radbard and Randver) than translated them. One might suggest a feminine form of the name Vybor, or, say, Vyverka – ‘squirrel’… though, of course, one could speculate endlessly.

The Slavic swordsmen became Harald’s main striking force at Bravalla. The left wing was led by the Wendish warrior Yakun ‘Cut Cheek’, with Hot on the right, whilst Visna remained close to the konung – who, incidentally, fought from a chariot – this was probably the last instance of chariots being used in warfare, at least in Europe, and at least until the battle wagons of the Czech Hussites.

The battle, given the number of warriors, turned out to be a terrible one. Yubbe Rogvolod, who was leading the Swedish-Norwegian-Russian army, fell by the hand of a Frisian. Veborg slew a certain Sota, one of Sigurd the Ring’s finest warriors, and wounded Starkkad, but fell herself, pierced by an arrow from the Norwegian Torkill of Telemark. Soon Yubbe too collapsed beneath a hail of arrows. Visna perished by the banner – Starkkad himself is said to have been her killer. Damn it, it took the mightiest of the Northern warriors living at that time to defeat a Slavic girl. Seeing defeat, Harald seized a sword in each hand and slew many of his nephew’s warriors. Finally, exhausted, he ordered his servant Bruni to kill him – the old king dreaded captivity. Boezub’s final command was carried out; Bruni smashed his master’s head with a club.

According to the sagas, the victor, Sigurd, burnt his uncle’s body on a pyre and scattered the ashes over his capital, the city of Leira in Zealand. Saxo, however, claims that the nephew buried Harald Toothpick in a burial mound along with his chariot, weapons and rich offerings.

Legends continued to circulate for a long time about the golden ship on which Odin carried the souls of those who had fallen in that battle to Valhalla.

Both sides suffered heavy losses, particularly the Swedes and Danes, the main adversaries. ‘The Lay of Norn-Gesta’ relates that Sigurd Ring spent the remainder of his life struggling to defend his lands against raids by the Curonians and the Lapps. The Jutes and Danes, who had submitted to him after Bravalla and the death of Boezub, did not, however, rebel – they lacked the strength for a revolt. Instead, they sought to vent their wounded pride on the Obodrites.

In vain.

In response, the Obodrites crossed the Little Belt and captured the island of Funen (I recommend you bear this fact in mind). Their chieftain, Vatne, killed Jarl Ali, Sigurd Kolts’s governor.

Ali’s son, Hamund, had learnt nothing from his father’s fate; he again attempted to impose a tribute on his eastern neighbours – and barely managed to repel the invasion of seven Obodrite princes. And yet he owed his victory less to his own strength or military prowess than to the fact that the Obodrite princes’ style of command brought to mind the well-known proverb about the seven nannies.

However, one might say he was lucky. The next ruler of the Jutes, Sifard, faced not a raid but a full-scale invasion. Sifard fled to Zealand; his son and daughters were taken captive by the Wendish prince Ismar (Vyshemir? Izmir?) and taken prisoner, whilst the whole of Jutland was placed under tribute to the Wends. Sivar’s daughters were sold – one to Norway, the other to Germany. His son, whose name was Jarmarik (a name which, if you think about it, sounds somewhat

16 For some reason, it is thought to mean ‘name’; a man named ‘Name’ is rather odd, not to say silly. It is more likely to be a verbal nickname like Imei – just the thing for a berserker.

(It's rather suspicious… could the mother of this 'Prince of Denmark' have been a Wend?), he managed to kill
'Ismar' and flee, and subsequently freed his kinsmen from tribute to the Wends.

However, is it not from this time that place names with typically Slavic endings have remained on Danish soil – Korzelice, Kramnice, Tillice, Binnice[17] and many others? The ring fortifications on the island of Lolland are considered Slavic, as is the fortress near Sore in central Zealand, where very archaic Slavic pottery has been found. The vast majority of Danish hoards from the early Middle Ages contain Slavic artefacts, or are even buried in Slavic pottery, which in itself speaks volumes – after all, the items could have been bought or looted during a raid, but it is unlikely that anyone in those days would have spent money on an overseas pot or considered it valuable booty.

Could the accounts in the Tidrek Saga of a Slavic 'konung' imposing tribute on all the coasts of the Baltic Sea date from this very period? Of course, this is a long way from the time of Theodoric the Goth… but what can one do? Epic poetry does not always align with chronology. In the same
'The Lay of Norn-Gest', Sigurd the Ring becomes a contemporary of his great namesake, Sigurd the Fafnir-slayer, the invulnerable Siegfried of Germanic legends.

It is quite possible that it was at this very time that the Northern language borrowed from the Slavic the term for a tribute-gathering expedition – polutasvarf, from 'poludye'. Given the existence of a native term ('veitsla'), the appearance of the Slavic term can only mean one thing – that at some point, people who spoke Slavic travelled through the Scandinavian lands to collect tribute – a fact confirmed by the saga of Thidrek and Saxo Grammaticus.

In any case, life in the Baltic Sea must have become very, very uncomfortable for the Scandinavians at that time. Was this not the beginning of their era of raids on Europe? After all, the Hungarians, roughly a century later, were merely refugees fleeing the Pechenegs who were slaughtering their nomadic tribes – and Europe was no less shaken by the mounted raids of these unfortunate refugees than by the sea raids of the Norwegians and Danes.

## Chapter IV
## IN THE SHORT GLOW OF NOON: VAREGIAN RUSSIA IN THE VIKING AGE

*The Viking Age.*
*When Varangian Rus was at its zenith.*
*The Obodrites-Rerici and their tribes.*
*The Velet tribes. Sereb. The Pomorians. Vineta – a*
*tale of the Varangian Sea.*
*The Rugians, Rusyns, Rus.*
*The Khagan, princes, priests. Names of*
*gods? No, names of idols. Warriors.*
*What is a 'Viking'? Non-Norman Normans.*
*Jomsvikings. Trade. The land is vast and bountiful.*
*Colonies beyond the Laba. Distant*
*settlements – Gotland, the Neman, the*
*Dvina, Ladoga.*
*Nothing foreshadowed disaster…*

*Long, long ago, perhaps a thousand years ago, or perhaps two thousand, the island to which the storm had driven the geese was not so desolate and wild. On its shore stood the rich and beautiful city of Vinetta.*

*Nowhere in the world were there weavers more skilled than in Vinetta; no one knew how to make such beautiful cups and daggers as the masters*

17 D. Egorov has shown that originally the ending 'itse' sounded like 'itsy', corresponding to Novgorod names such as Gostilitsa, Zimnitsa, and so on.

*Vinnetta; no one could weave such delicate lace as the lace-makers of Vinnetta.*

*Every day, some ships, laden with rich goods, set sail from the quay, whilst other ships, laden with gold and silver, returned from distant voyages. The inhabitants of Vinetta traded with every city under the sun. Their ships sailed all the seas and found shelter and rest in every harbour.*

**Selma Lagerlöf**

The Viking Age is generally considered to have begun in 793. The first victim was St Cuthbert's monastery on the island of Lindisfarne. It ended with the Battle of Stamford Bridge in the autumn of 1066, where Harald the Fierce, the last Viking chieftain, who was also a poet and the son-in-law of Yaroslav the Wise, fell in battle against the English.

But why are we speaking of the heyday of Varangian Rus' during the Viking Age? After all, it would seem that chroniclers of later periods are the ones who recount stories of a life of plenty and freedom, of wealthy trading cities, and of magnificent temples dedicated to a multitude of gods? Thitmar of Merseburg and Adam of Bremen wrote in the 11th century, Helmold and Saxo Grammaticus in the 12th.

But can we seriously speak of a golden age for the Slavic towns of the Varangian coast in the 11th–12th centuries? This was the decline, not the heyday, of the pagan civilisation of the Varangian coast. A gruelling religious war against the finest warriors of Christian Europe, coupled with ceaseless strife amongst the Varangian principalities themselves, the onslaught of the Franks, Saxons and Danes from the west, the Christianisation of Rus' in the East, and the severing of trade links with the South Baltic pagans in the rapidly Christianising world around them – all this could not have had a beneficial effect on life in Varangian Rus'. If Christian preachers in the 11th century saw it as flourishing, then the foundations for this must have been laid centuries earlier, during the very period commonly referred to as the Viking Age – and perhaps, in part, even earlier.

*The Viking raids through the eyes of the Vikings themselves*

*The Viking raid through the eyes of their neighbours*

But now, at last, let us take a closer look at the settlement patterns of the peoples and tribes of Varangian Rus'. Incidentally, this too is a sign of prosperity – by the Viking Age, the Baltic Slavs had spread further afield than ever before. The Laba River was no longer the western frontier, whilst new lands were being actively settled in the east.

Moreover, the list of tribes and their relationships had already fully taken shape by the 8th century and remained unchanged (with a single exception, which we shall discuss shortly). It is from this very period that we can speak not speculatively but with certainty about the Obodrites, who, in all likelihood, occupied the leading position in that tribal confederation 'from the Ister to the western

ocean', which had once been occupied by the Varni. The tribal alliance now took the following form: the Obodrites themselves, or the Rerici ('falcons'), inhabited the area from the Bay of Lübeck and Lake Ratibor to the lower reaches of the Varna, where their fortress of Wurle stood. To the south, they were bounded by the Elda River. The Obodrites' fortresses were Zwerin (now Schwerin) and Wyszemir (Wismar). The Bavarian Geographer also subdivides the Obodrites themselves into the 'Northabrits' and
'Ostabtrits', i.e. the northern and eastern groups, counting 53 'towns' for the former and 100 for the latter – but this division is not found in any other source. I have already mentioned that the Obodrites were also known on the Danube – roughly in the areas where the Rugian-Rus state was located – and their specific customs, such as tattooing the hands with plant patterns, have survived right up to modern times. The main city of the Obodrites was Veligard, also known as Rerik (after their name) and, in German, Mecklenburg – meaning 'great city'.

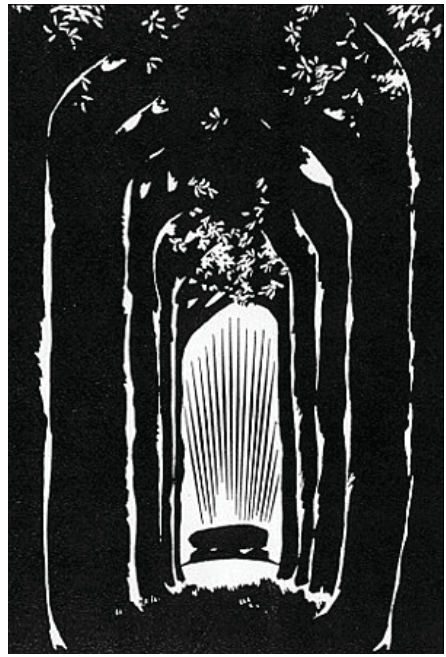
The former leaders of the tribal confederation, the Varni ('crows'), lived to the east of the newcomers, on the river that still bears their name today – the Varna. To the south, their territories bordered the same Elda, extending no further than Lakes Plavskoye and Myuritskoye. One could well imagine that the elderly Varna men loved to grumble – 'Back when *we* were in charge,' they'd say, 'we held lands all the way to the Danube, not like these lot, those clear-eyed falcons… they've… tsk, they've let it all slip away… ah, those were the days.'

Most of modern Holstein was occupied by the Wagri (a name sharing the same root as 'otvag a'); their lands stretched from the sea and the Trave as far as Edgora, Neumünster and Segerberg. The island of Fehmarn (Fembra in medieval chronicles) belonged to them. Living on the very doorstep of the Varangian Rus', in a land through which every stranger passed, the Wagrians did not build particularly strong defences – outside the city walls stood little more than reed huts, which they had no qualms about abandoning at the first sign of alarm, when the men took up arms and the children, women and elderly fled to the fortresses or into the woods if the fortress was not nearby. Bread was hidden in pits, so that the enemy had no choice but to burn the Vagri huts – which the Vagri did not particularly value. The Slavs on the Danube lived in exactly the same way in the sixth century, according to Byzantine accounts; people in the steppe regions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Muscovite Tsardom lived in exactly the same way in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – not out of incompetence, nor out of poverty (it was not just bread that was thrown into the pits – sometimes silver and gold were also thrown into the pits), but because there was little point in putting much effort into a dwelling that would burn down, if not this summer, then the next. However, just like the Ants and the Cossacks, the Wagrs should not be regarded as hapless victims – on the contrary, they were the finest and most dangerous warriors and sea raiders on the coast; not a single Danish island, not a single yard of the rocks or sandy beaches of Jutland could feel safe from a Wagr raid. 'Denmark, consisting for the most part of islands and surrounded by water, cannot easily protect itself from attacks by sea raiders, because the bends of its coastline provide an exceptionally convenient hiding place for the Slavs; emerging secretly from ambush, they strike sudden blows against it. In general, the Slavs succeed in war chiefly through their ambushes. And for that reason, even in recent times, the life of piracy among them has intensified to such an extent that, disregarding all the benefits of agriculture, they were perpetually ready for sea expeditions and raids, relying on their ships as the sole means of enrichment, wrote Helmold. – 'They pay no heed to the attacks of the Danes, and even consider it a special pleasure to fight them.' Such were these Vagrians. Within their tribe there are two smaller sub-groups – the Suselians and the Pluni. The main stronghold of the Wagrian lands was Starigard (it is persistently and quite incorrectly referred to as StargRAD in our literature, but 'grad' is a South Slavic form; the Wends and Varangians spoke of 'gard' right up until the 18th century), or, as the Germans called it, Oldenburg. In Starigard, according to the Saxon chronicler Widukind of Corvey, a copper idol of a certain 'Saturn' was worshipped – alas, it is pointless to speculate which deity the monk had in mind. Furthermore, in a sacred oak grove not far from the town, enclosed by an 'artfully crafted fence' and guarded by a priest living there, a certain 'Prone' was worshipped, in whom Perun is easily recognised. The settlements of Pron across the strait from Rügen and Pronstorf in the land of the Wagrs are referred to in medieval documents as Peron and Perone respectively. Incidentally, modern Germans remember this very well. Conrad Botto, whom we are already familiar with, states in the 'Saxon Chronicle' that in the sanctuary of 'Prone'

banners adorned with bells were kept, and the idol itself, before which
'divine judgement' – the litigants would take turns touching a red-hot ploughshare, and the winner was determined by whose burns healed first – was endowed with enormous… ears. The Pole Stryjkowski, a contemporary of Konrad Botto, similarly 'endowed' the Kyiv idol of Perun *with* golden *ears* in his work. In the Pole's case, it was, so to speak,
a 'game of Chinese whispers' – in the chronicle, the Thunderer had ***a*** golden ***moustache***, not ears. It seems that Konrad made the same mistake.

*A memorial stone. Formerly Peron, now Pronstorf in the land of the Wagrs.*

The Polabians lived along the banks of the Laba-Elbe; this was the collective name for several small tribes – the Smeldings, the Vetnichi and the Mintgs. The ending in 'ing' may seem to indicate a Germanic origin for the name, but this is not the case – at that very time, the Slavic people of the Milings lived far from any Germans, in the Peloponnese. In modern Polish, the Baltic tribe referred to in our chronicles as the Yotvingians is pronounced 'Yadzvingi', and even the steppe-dwelling Pechenegs are called
'Pecheningi'. In the past, the Germanic, Baltic and Slavic languages were closer to one another than they are today. The name of the Mints, meanwhile, resembles that of the Lithuanian prince Mindaugas (Mindaugas). It is quite possible that their name is a relic of the Baltic population of the region, just as the name of the Zirmunts tribe, which was part of the Lusatian Confederation, is. 'Mints' in Lithuanian means 'thought' (compare
'mental' – of the mind, 'mentality' – way of thinking), 'daug' – many. Mindaugas – one who thinks deeply, Velymis in Russian. Of course, the name of the clan could not have derived directly from 'thought' – but it could well have come from a personal name of the same meaning. All three tribes had eleven fortresses. The chief of their cities was Ratibor – present-day Ratisburg. The Polabians were also part of the Obodrite Confederation. They venerated a certain Podaga, and a three-headed idol (possibly of her).



*A sacred grove of the pagans. Werner Graul, 1936*

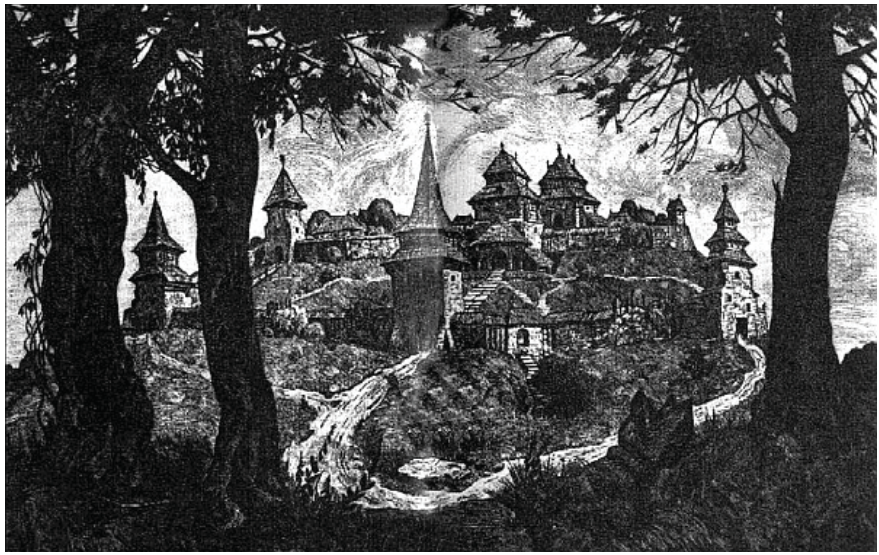
It is unclear whether the Drewan tribe – the very one that preserved ‘Venska Goren’, the Wendish language, until the 18th century.

We are already quite familiar with the Veleti (‘giants, mighty men’). From the borders of the Obodrites, their lands extended as far as the middle Oder. Under Charles David the Great, they quite certainly reached the sea in the area of present-day Peenemünde; however, by all accounts, they had access to it even earlier – Utrecht-Wiltburg was a port city at the time, and it is doubtful that the Obodrites, who were not particularly friendly towards the Veleites, and before them the Varni, would have allowed the Veleites to move freely to and from it across their lands. In the 9th century, Einhard wrote: ‘On the southern shore of the Baltic Sea live the Slavs and the Estonians (i.e. the Prussians, the Lithuanians) and various other peoples, and among them the Velians hold the foremost place.’ Two centuries later, an English chronicler described them as the most savage robbers on land and at sea, whilst an Italian characterised them as ‘the most ferocious people, more ferocious than ferocity itself’. A Bavarian geographer lists 95 towns and four regions among them. By ‘regions’, it seems, are meant the four largest tribes of the Veletian confederation mentioned by Helmold: the Ratari, the Dolenci, the Cerzpeni and the Khizani.

The Ratari (Redarii, Retrians) lived around the triangular city of Radigost[18], where that very same Radigost Svarozhich was venerated – according to some researchers, the deified ancestor of the Wendish princes, Radegast-Radagais, the terror of Rome. Adam of Bremen calls this city ‘world-famous’, ‘the seat of idolatry’. One of the two greatest sanctuaries of Varangian Rus’, Radigosch welcomed pilgrims from distant lands – even from Bohemia, two centuries after it had adopted a foreign faith; pilgrims came here seeking prophecies from the fearsome Deity with a bull’s head on his shield, a bird of prey on his helmet and an axe in his hand. Svarozhich was surrounded by a host of lesser gods; on the pedestal

18 I am of the opinion that Radigoshch is the name of the city, and Retra that of the region; the city came to be regarded by that name due to a misunderstanding.

on which their names were *inscribed* (that is to say, the Veleites knew how to write). The Veleites' banners, under which they marched into battle, were also kept there – under no other circumstances were they to be touched. From the chronicles we know that a certain goddess was depicted on the Veleites' banners; alas, it is unclear exactly who she was. Likewise, the Veleites carried a huge cross before their army – as is well known, the cross is far older than Christianity. At least one banner was red – Saint Bruno of Querfurt indignantly denounces the German king who had formed an alliance with the Veleites and placed, alongside the Christian army marching ahead, the sacred objects and the 'bloody' [19]banners of 'the devil Svarozhich'. The temple was adorned with animal horns and red drapery. On the outside, the temple walls were covered with images of gods and goddesses, carved with a realism that astonished onlookers. We, however, recalling the altar of Krod from Gotzlar, shall not be unduly surprised by this. Apart from the temple, there was nothing else in the triangular town with its three gates – two leading to the forest and one to Lake Tollensee. On the walls stood grim reminders of the giants' victories – tall poles topped with the skulls of defeated enemies.



*Radigosch as seen through the eyes of the early 20th-century Polish artist Stanisław Jakubowski*

Prophecies were made at the temple by priests, who cast some sort of lots – could they have been runes? However, the ritual differed from the casting of runes – the divination was performed in a freshly dug pit; the lots were cast into it, and then the pit was covered with turf. A sacred white horse, considered to be Svarozhich's horse, lived at the sanctuary, and before military campaigns and other important undertakings, the horse was led over three spears tied together in the shape of a cross. If the horse stepped over all three crosses with its right hoof – excellent, everything would turn out for the best. If it stepped over once with its left hoof, the matter would not go off without a hitch. If, however, it stepped over all three times with its left hoof, it was better not to attempt it at all, for the gods did not approve. One might suppose that it also mattered which of the crosses the left hoof stepped over first: at the beginning, in the middle, or – worst of all! – at the end of the planned undertaking, a treacherous blow of fate awaited those making the divination.

Only priests were permitted to sit within the walls of the sacred city; the rest, whilst there, had to remain standing out of respect for the place.

There was also a legend that when the next period of turmoil and civil strife was imminent, at night from

19 In some translations – 'stained with human blood'. Could this be where the Germans got the idea for the Blutfahne?

the lake, a boar of monstrous proportions with enormous white tusks would emerge onto the shore and wallow in the mud.

I fear the mysterious boar has had to leave the sacred lake all too often…[20]

In 1127, Radigoshch was destroyed by the Christian army, so thoroughly that not even any legends about its location have survived. S.V. Alekseev suggests that Radigoshch is the Feldberg settlement, complete with a church building. Such structures were also found in smaller settlements, such as Gross-Raden, recently reconstructed—not by Slavs, shame on them!—but by German antiquarians. Incidentally, a horse's skull and six spearheads were found in that temple—traces of a ritual with which we are already familiar.

*The reconstructed temple in Gross-Raden*

The second tribe of giants, after the guardians of the shrine, were the Doleni or Dolenians. To the north, their lands stretched as far as the Pene River; to the south, they abutted a dense forest between Lake Tollensee and the Ukra River.

The Cerzpenians took their name because they lived beyond the Pene, 'across the Pene' from the Dolents and the Ratarians. They had trading towns – Dymyn (later Demmin), Veligost (Velgast) and Gostkov (Gützkov). Later, the Cerzpenians annexed the lands of the small Tribushan tribe from the Trebel River, and the town of Barta on the coast of the strait beyond which lay Rügen. In Velgost there was a temple dedicated to Gerovit or Yarovit, where his spear and shield were venerated; these were carried at the head of the army – part banner, part war talisman, part all of the above. A white horse also lived at the temple, for much the same reason as in Radigoshche. The priest of Yarovit, clad in white robes and crowned with a green wreath, would address the worshippers in the first person on behalf of God:

'I am your God, I am He who clothes the fields with grass and the forests with foliage; in My power lie the fruits of the fields and trees, the offspring of the herds, and all that serves the good of mankind: all this I give to those who honour Me and take away from those who reject Me.'

20 In the Russian epic, the 'beast of the wild boar' emerges from the sea just before Prince Vladimir sets out to take the wife of his subordinate, Prince Danila Lovchanin, and sends his mighty warriors against him.

In terms of symbolism, attire, and the nature of the gifts – for this is not a matter of wisdom, victories in battle, or success in trade; no, the priest speaks of fruits and offspring—of the festival at the end of April, with ‘sensual’ dances, of the custom of a man representing the incarnate Deity; in Yarovite, they recognise the full likeness of the East Slavic Yarila,
‘Green Yuri’ of folk Christianity, and the South Slavic Herman.

Between the Cerzpenians, the Varni and the Obodrites (that is, the small tribe of the Obodrites, not the confederation they led) lay, on the seacoast, the land of the Khizhans or Kichans, the weakest and poorest of the Velet tribes. It was they who were once conquered, whether by the Vagri or the Varni. Their name means ‘inhabitants of fishermen’s huts’. Perhaps our modern
‘hut’ may not be a strong enough word for this instance. Shack-dwellers, hovel-dwellers – something like that. Nevertheless, due to their numbers or other reasons, the Khizhans held fourth place in the Veletian alliance[21] .

*An image from Volgast; it is believed to be Yarovit. Hmm.*

There were also other tribes and clans, seemingly belonging to the Veletian lands as well, but

21 The four tribes—‘regions’—bear a striking resemblance to the four varna of the Indo-Aryans and the four estates of Celtic Ireland. The Ratari – guardians of the sanctuary, Brahmins, or, if you will, Druids. The Dolents—the Dolent people—fight ‘for glory’ rather than ‘out of necessity’—in them one can recognise the Kshatriyas. These two tribes dominate the rest. The Cerzpenians control numerous trading towns and worship Yarovit, the god of offspring and harvest – they resemble the Vaishyas or Bo-Aire – free community-owning farmers. Finally, in the Kichans one recognises the Shudras or servants.

A caste system existed among the neighbours and allies of the giants – the Saxons. In the words of the 9th-century chronicler, Rudolf:
‘This people consists of four categories of people: the noble, the free, the freedmen and the serfs. By the provisions of the law, none of these four classes may break down the boundaries between them through marriage; rather, the nobles must marry nobles, the free must marry the free, the freedmen must marry freedwomen, and the slaves must marry maidservants. If any of them takes a wife from another class, he must atone for his offence with his life.’

It is unclear whether the Velets were actually included among the four main tribes. Were they branches of the four senior tribes, or allies, or simply small tribes maintaining their independence whilst manoeuvring between the large and powerful tribal confederations? This can no longer be ascertained.

The Morichi lived between Lake Müritz and Lake Dolen (Tollensee). On the Elbe, opposite present-day Magdeburg, lived the Morecans. In the area now known as Prignitz lived the Brezhans, and nearby on the same river, the Gavola, lived the Gavolians or Stodorians, who had eight towns, the most important of which were Branibor (present-day Brandenburg) and Postupim (Potsdam), mentioned in chronicles as early as 993. There were the Neletichi between the Stepenica and the Dossa, and the Linyane (also known as the Liuuni, Linoni, or Lingoni in various chronicles – another Baltic legacy?), who settled on the right bank of the Elbe as far as the Varni and Polabians. Truly tiny tribes appear in imperial and papal documents: the Lisichi by the Elbe, the Semchichi by the Strumena, the Dassia or Doksani near the town of Vysoka (Wittstock), the Lyubushane near the town of Lyubush on the Oder, the Spreyane along the middle reaches of the Spree, and the Plone in the vicinity of Herzig.

In the lower reaches of the Oder, between Pena and Dolenica, lived the Ukry or Ukran on the Ukra River, the Rechans, the Plots, the Horits, and the Mezhiryts – whether the Mezhiryts, descendants of a certain Mezhir (a name found in Novgorod birch-bark letters), or the inhabitants of the inter-river region. There were also the Grozvyny, the Vanzly (might this be the last remnant of the Vandals?), and the Vostrozhy.

To the south of the Velets and Reriks lay the tribal confederation of the Serbs-Luzhichans, ‘Sereb’ according to our chronicle. They will not play an active part in our narrative, so I shall not go into detail about them. Sereb’ has no connection whatsoever with the origins of Rus’; it did not become famous for its magnificent pagan temples or wealthy cities, nor did it offer such fierce resistance to the Christian advance. In the civilisation I am speaking of here, they were, if anything, on the fringes. The descendants of the Serbs still live in Germany today. If you read Otfried Preussler’s fairy tales as a child ‘The Little Water Sprite’, ‘The Little Ghost’, ‘The Little Baba Yaga’, or watched the cartoons based on them, or read his magnificent novel *Krabat* in later years (but not the film of the same name!), or seen the illustrations by Merčin Novak, you may consider yourself at least somewhat familiar with this culture.

On the coast of the Varangian Sea, east of the Oder and stretching as far as the Prussian oak forests, lived the Slovincians by Lake Lebsko, and the Kashubians—mentioned as far back as the 10th century by the Arab Masudi—who lived along the Vistula as far as Lake Żarnów. To the south, an impenetrable forest separated these tribes, who lived by the sea, from the Poles. Together they were known as the Pomorians.

The main city of the Pomorians was the trading centre of Szczecin (or Szczecin). It (or rather, she) was called ‘the mother of the Pomorian cities’ – exactly that, word for word – which inevitably brings to mind
‘the mother of Russian cities’, the chronicle-era nickname for Kyiv. That is where it came from… Divided into four ‘kontiny’ (ends), Szczecin stood on three hills, on the summit of the middle one of which stood the sanctuary of Triglav – a huge idol, as one might guess from its very name, ‘ ’ (three-headed)[22] . According to its worshippers, the three heads signified power over Heaven, Earth and the Underworld. The eyes on the three faces were covered by a ‘golden bandage’. Otherwise, the temple resembled the Radigoshch in the land of the Ratars, with which we are already familiar, though perhaps less warlike and more luxurious. It was entirely covered with sculptures and images of people, birds and beasts ‘protruding from the walls’ – that is, bas-reliefs. According to Catholic preachers, all of them were carved so skilfully that they seemed alive. Moreover, the Pomeranians had painted their sanctuary in bright colours, which proved impervious to snow, rain, sun and wind. Silver and gold chalices were kept here, brought out on feast days for communal feasts for the most noble and illustrious people; here was kept the tithe of the spoils taken at sea or on land; here were the horns from which

22 I would like to take this opportunity to point out that the word ‘Triglav’ is used in the sources solely in this sense. He does not imply any
‘pagan trinities’ or ‘principles of trinity’ are implied – it is a specific statue of a specific Deity.

from which they drank, encased in gold and adorned with precious stones; here were weapons and ‘precious vessels, rare and beautiful to behold’. And looking at all this joyful variety, glitter and radiance, it was hard to believe that at the centre of it all stood a gloomy, blind idol, to whom, just as Svarozhich is dedicated among the ploughmen, a prophetic horse is consecrated, whose hooves foretell the future – but only a raven-black one.

The Prince of the Pomorians did not have a permanent palace, but in every town he owned a courtyard where he and his retinue could stay (this apparently resembled the ‘polyudye’ in Kievan Rus’). Anyone who entered the prince’s courtyard became inviolable – as if they had entered a temple or a sacred grove. The Prince of the Pomors had twenty-four concubines – which is somewhat reminiscent of the twelve wives of the epic hero Vladimir Vseslavich Krasno Solnyshko, about whom F.I. Buslaev wrote. The sanctity of the princely court also has a parallel in Russian epic poetry – Alyosha Popovich refuses to throw back the knife hurled at him by Tugarin.

Apart from Shchetina, there were two other major towns in Pomorye – Kamen and Kolobreg – and a multitude of smaller ones. In Kamen, two exquisitely crafted chests were found, which, for some reason, still adorn books on… Scandinavian craftsmanship from the Viking Age.

But the true centres of Varangian civilisation, its heartland, were two islands.
The island of Wolin at the mouth of the Oder and the island of Rügen to the north-west of it.

I shall begin with Volyn.

A huge trading city stood there. Different sources refer to it by different names. The chronicles of the German monks call it Yumna, the Scandinavian sagas call it Jomsburg – whilst the skaldic poems simply refer to it as Jom. Polish chronicles and Russian epics refer to it by the name of the island, Volyn, whilst later German legends call it Vineta. If you have ever read – and I mean read, not watched – *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, you, dear reader, are no doubt already nodding in recognition. Yes, yes, that very same enchanted Vineta. And, incidentally, the parable of the ‘blind horse’ by our brilliant educator Ushinsky is also about her – this, incidentally, together with Selma Lagerlöf’s fairy tale, is almost the only conscious[23] mention of the great city and the entire civilisation it represented that was available to me during my Soviet childhood.

*An excerpt from the casket in Kamen*

23 I do not count the chronicle tales about the Varangians, which Soviet publishers reprinted without having the slightest idea who they were writing about. Nor do I count the bylinas with their ‘Volyn Sea’ – here, not only the publishers but also the storytellers had no idea what they were singing about.

*Vineta, sunk to the bottom of the sea. Woodcut, 1881. Based on a drawing by Bernhard Merlins*

Here, incidentally, is what German legends say about the main trading port of the Varangian coast:

'Its sumptuous houses were adorned with stained-glass windows. Columns of white marble and alabaster supported the canopies over the entrances to the dwellings. Gilded roof tiles reflected the sunlight and filled the streets with a yellow glow until sunset. The men of Vineta wore cloaks trimmed with expensive furs and berets with long feathers. The women were draped in velvet and silk, their necks encircled by heavy gold jewellery set with enormous precious stones. Young girls spun yarn on small spinning wheels using golden spindles. Wine was drunk there from golden goblets, and holes in the walls were plugged with bread."

Judging by these berets with feathers, it is clear that the legend is not a century or two younger than the city. Perhaps five hundred years. Incidentally, we do happen to know what headgear was actually worn in Varangian Rus'. On the coats of arms of Mecklenburg, there is a specific figure known as a 'Wend'. It is depicted wearing a tall, pointed cap with a fur trim. That is how it is identified.

Yes, the legend is wildly fantastical. It was invented by someone who, it seems, never lived in a house without holes in the walls. But the impression it made on those who saw the city—an impression that pierced through several centuries like a spear of deafening luxury and incredible wealth—the legend conveyed accurately. Perhaps, having read this, you will find it

easier to accept what is recorded in the chronicles of the contemporaries of Volyn-Yumna-Vineta and in dry archaeological statistics.

Adam of Bremen writes: ‘Beyond the land of the Lutici, who are also called the Vilci, flows the River Oder... At its mouth... lies the most famous city of Yumna... It **is** truly **the largest of all the cities in Europe**. It is inhabited by Slavs and other peoples, Greeks and barbarians. And visiting Saxons are also granted equal rights to live alongside everyone else, provided, however, that whilst remaining there, they do not display their adherence to Christianity. For, after all, they all still wander the false paths of pagan rites. However, as for manners and hospitality, there is no people more worthy of respect and more hospitable. This city, rich in the goods of all the northern peoples, possesses everything that is pleasant or rare. There are also volcanic vessels there, which the locals call ‘Greek fire’.

It is very curious – what exactly is this ‘Greek fire’? Surely it is not the monstrous weapon of Orthodox Byzantium (which, according to other legends, contained human fat), the napalm of the Middle Ages, that was meant? Had the people of Volyn had such a thing in their hands, the history of the Germanic advance into the East would have ended before it had even begun. Researchers believe that what was meant was… a lighthouse. Which, frankly speaking, whilst perhaps not as sensational as real ‘Greek fire’, is not far behind. I vaguely recall that lighthouses off these shores would once again be lit during the era of feathered berets – half a thousand years after Adam of Bremen.

But something else is even more intriguing: a Christian, a clergyman, a Western European, who surely had some idea of the European capitals of the time – and of Rome, for that matter! – describes a settlement of pagans as ‘the greatest of all the cities in Europe’. Not the brutal Vikings or the romantic Celts – but the Slavs. Who, as we know, are supposed to sit in the marshes and breathe through a reed, waiting for a clever Khazar to bring them culture, a Scandinavian to bring them statehood, and a Byzantine to bring them faith.

I understand very well those who, in defiance of their own eyes and common sense—which insists that Adam had no need to take upon himself the double sin of perjury and praising the heathen—might wish to somehow overlook or fail to grasp this direct and clear message. It clashes all too painfully with what we are taught, with what is drummed into the subconscious of ‘every intelligent person’.

And that leads to rather unpleasant consequences. When, for example, a historian, ‘quoting’ a medieval chronicler, writes ‘the greatest city of the Slavs’.

It’s easy enough to understand. Very easy, in fact. But that doesn’t stop the lie from being a lie, and the historian turns from a historian into a cheat.

Therefore, reader, I shall not do this. I shall reproduce here exactly what Adam of Bremen wrote. And whom to believe – modern historians, who know exactly what could and could not have been a thousand years ago, or a chronicler who lived at that time, who, at the very least, spoke to people who had seen Volyn-Yumna, if he had not visited it himself – that is up to you.

Here is how the ‘Saga of the Jomsvikings’ describes the city of Jom:

‘Soon a large, well-fortified town was built there. Part of the town stood on a headland and was surrounded by the sea. There was a harbour there capable of accommodating three hundred and sixty longboats, and in such a way that they would all be sheltered by the town’s fortifications. Everything there was so cleverly arranged that the entrance to the harbour was blocked by a large stone arch. At the entrance to the bay, there were iron gates that could be locked from the inside. At the top of the arch stood a tower, in which catapults were installed.”

*Volyn. Metalwork.*

A harbour that could be closed off and catapults on the towers.

Let me emphasise, dear reader, that this was the Viking Age, the 'Dark Ages' and all that. The remote, pagan Baltic. And its Slavic shore, to boot.

Imagine what an impression all this must have made, not just on the Scandinavians, but on those very preachers of the Roman Church. Imagine it – and realise that the mood aroused in the inhabitants of other lands at the sight of this marvel, a legend of golden spindles and bread within the walls, is conveyed perfectly [by24].

In the 10th century, a Jewish slave trader from Arab Spain, Ibrahim ibn Yaqub, visited Central Europe. He called Volyn-Vineta the 'island of the twelve gates'.

And what do the scholars tell us? Impressionable travellers are prone to exaggeration, not to mention boastful Vikings. Perhaps there really was nothing remarkable at the mouth of the Oder?

'As early as the 9th century, it covered an area of 50 hectares,' writes historian V.V. Fomin about Volyn-Vineta, 'and its population in the 10th century numbered around 5–10 thousand [people25] (by way of comparison, the Swedish town of Birka, which is usually described not only as the largest trading centre in Sweden but also in the entire Baltic region, covered an area of 12 hectares in the mid-9th century, whilst the Danish town of Hedeby, at the height of its prosperity in the 10th century, – covered an area of 24 hectares, and its population numbered several hundred people, perhaps even more than a thousand). In the 11th century, Baltic trade, having reached a flourishing state, was concentrated precisely in Volyn (almost ***a third of all the Pomor treasures*** have been discovered in its vicinity

24 It is curious that in Russian epics, too, the city of 'Volynets', from which a certain boyar's or merchant's son named Duke arrives in Rus' (could Duke be the Slav mentioned by Saxo Grammaticus?), is surrounded by an atmosphere of boundless wealth – Duke's maids are dressed more lavishly than the princesses of Kyiv.

25 In London at that time, for example, there were, according to historians, 5,000 inhabitants. The excavated part of Volyn-Vineta ***is larger than London***.

), and it, as the West was firmly convinced at the time, was second only to Constantinople.

Archaeologists have uncovered a wealth of creations by skilled craftsmen, jewellers, blacksmiths and turners – the lathe was, it seems, very well known in Volyn-Vineta. Scissors, keys, spurs, locks, idols, weapons, amulets, chain mail, trade weights, scissors, fastenings, scales, carved bone combs, jewellery, and even a pysanka egg. Many of the wooden and bone objects are covered in the finest carvings. Streets paved with wooden planks have also been found, which Otto of Bamberg's biographer mentioned with some surprise.

*Volyn. Wood carving*

However, that may not be the whole story.

The German historian Klaus Goldman, PhD – and I emphasise this to avoid accusations of Slavophile bias from scholars – asserts in his book *Vineta* that the city was originally surrounded by a dam. What's interesting here isn't that the Volyn people knew how to build dams, reclaiming land from the sea – after the lighthouse and the catapults that closed the harbour gates, I'm already prepared to believe in dams too. Well, so what if it turns out that yet another detail of the tale retold by Fru Lagerlöf is true – about the wall with which the inhabitants of Vineta tried to shield themselves from the sea king who had turned against them. What is important here is something quite different. According to Herr Goldman's account, King Magnus's Christianised Danes, during the storming of the city, unleashed a localised deluge upon the rebellious pagans by breaching the dam. In other words, a fair portion of the city now lies submerged, hidden from archaeological excavations.

*Volyn. Carved bone*

It is curious – as reported by the journal 'The Marxist Historian' in its fourth issue of 1936 in an article with the ominous title 'The Fascistisation of History in Germany' – that in the Third Reich, Vineta was heavily promoted, excavations were carried out there, and books were written about it, comparing it to Rome and Baghdad. I can even understand it to some extent – a huge city with technologies that were cutting-edge for the time – catapults! A lighthouse! A lockable harbour! A dam! – it looked like a precursor to the Reich's technical megalomania (and indeed the diesel age in general). I really don't know how they resolved the issue that the city was inhabited overwhelmingly by people who were by no means Teutons. It just saddens me that in the Third Reich, this Slavic wonder was promoted and shouted about to the whole world – whereas in the Soviet Union, where I grew up, one could only learn about Vineta from the fairy tales of the foreign author Lagelöf and the pre-revolutionary Ushinsky. It's sad and strange.

Back in Volhynia, there was a spear said to be… Julius Caesar's. Moreover, it was not only the Germans who wrote about Caesar's connection with Volhynia, but also the Polish *Great Chronicle*. It must surely have been brought there, along with the legend, by some 'Federate' Wering. It seems difficult to imagine any other common memory shared by Rome and Vineta. Of course, even if this were the case, it is unlikely that the spear ever had any connection to the founder of the Roman Empire and the Julian calendar. It is far more likely that, in the 4th century, some Roman official, inwardly roaring with laughter, handed an ancient pilum lying idle in the armouries to a barbarian overcome with joy, under the pretence of it being 'the weapon of the Divine Julius'. Well, the Romans' joke, if indeed there was one, came back to haunt them – I've already mentioned Odoacer.

In Volhynia, just as in Szczecin, Triglav was venerated – only here his idol was small enough to be hidden in a hollow.

But it was cast in gold!

*Volyn. Triglav*

Such was Volhynia, Yumna, the fabled Vineta, the Jomsburg of the northerners. A pagan metropolis of medieval Europe. A centre of wealth and, if I may put it that way, of cutting-edge – for those times – technical thought, though not particularly renowned for military valour or fervent worship of the ancient gods.

All this was more than compensated for by Rügen, Ruyan, the 'Island of Rus' of Arab and Persian geographical accounts.

Adam mentions it in passing, describing the inhabitants of Ruyan as the most ferocious pirates alongside the Wagrians of Femarn. 'Nothing is to be undertaken in public affairs without their consent: such is the fear they inspire because of their close ties with the gods—or rather, the demons—whom they worship with greater reverence than others,' he adds. Helmold provides a more detailed account of the island and its sacred sites. The most detailed description, however, was left to us by an old acquaintance, Saxo Grammaticus, who was personally present during the campaign of the Danish King Valdemar—the great-grandson of our Monomakh—against Rügen.

The Life of Otto of Bamberg refers to the island's inhabitants as rutheni, that is, Rusyns[26] (not to be confused with ruteni without the 'h' – a Celtic tribe). They levy tribute from the entire coast, yet pay tribute to no one themselves; they are extremely displeased that the coastal inhabitants listen to Christian preachers, and when Otto attempts to preach to them,

26 Meanwhile, in the writings of the island's inhabitants, they are persistently referred to by the Danish nickname 'Rani'. With the same ease, one might say 'In the Battle of Kulikovo, the Tatars defeated the Urus', or 'the Tsar of the Rus' prevented England from entering the American Civil War on the side of the South'.

to talk about their own genealogy. This is reminiscent of the Rus' from the 'Tidrek Saga', who reproached none other than Attila for his scrawniness: 'his father Osid was an insignificant king, and his lineage is not as noble as that of the Rus' people, our kinsmen'[27] .

*Caspar David Friedrich. The chalk cliffs of Rügen*

It is most likely this very Rus that Helmold is referring to when he asserts that the journey from the Swedish town of Birka to the Swedish province of Skåne takes as many days as the journey to Rus. Naturally, this cannot be a reference to Novgorod.

About a hundred years before Helmold, the Rus' were mentioned by Ibn Yaqub, whom we are already familiar with. Among other things, he recounted in his notes that the Rus' attacked the Prussians (referring to East Prussia with its Königsberg, now Kaliningrad) from *the west* by ship.

And it was most likely from here that, according to Al-Yaqubi, the 'pagans known as the Ar-Rus' carried out a raid on the Arab city of Seville in 844. 'They took captives, plundered, burned and killed.' This raid also left a material trace – in the town of Ralsvik (a later, German name) on the island of Rügen, a hoard was found containing – the only one in the entire Baltic region! – Arab silver coins from Spain, minted shortly before the raid. There are very few hoards of Spanish-Arabic silver from the Viking Age in the Baltic region; indeed, there are no known finds dating from such an early period at all.

In the 9th–10th centuries, Arabs and Persians frequently spoke of the 'island of the Rus', where the sacred ruler, the khagan, reigned; from there the Rus set out on trading voyages or military campaigns by ship, and to which tribute from neighbouring Slavs was brought; they spoke of its priests, who did not even submit to the 'king of the Rus', on the contrary, it is he who must submit to the priests, for they speak on behalf of the gods and can sacrifice anyone (by default, including the 'king').

Well, we have already discussed the identification of the Rugians with the Rus' by German authors.

Helmold writes of the cult of the 'Rusyns' as follows: 'Sventovit, the god of the land of Ruya, took first place among all the Slavic deities, the brightest in victory, the most persuasive in

27 I admit, however, that the island Rusyns did not succumb to ambition, but merely returned kindness for kindness, if Otto began reading the Gospel to them with the lengthy genealogy of his god.

answers. Therefore, in our time, not only the Vagrians' land[28] , but all other Slavic lands sent offerings here annually, honouring him as the god of gods. The king, however, is held in lower esteem among them than the priests. For the latter carefully discerns the answers [of the deities] and interprets what is revealed in the divinations. He acts upon the instructions of the divinations, whilst the king and the people depend on his instructions.

Among the various sacrifices, the priest is in the habit of occasionally offering up human beings – Christians – claiming that blood of this kind gives the gods particular delight.'

This looks like a retelling in other words, perhaps even simply a different translation of the same text – did the Rus' not have something of this sort, something like a narrative about their land set to verse for greater memorability?

Just as Tacitus spoke of the 'special reverence' shown by the 'Rugians' towards their kings, and just as Eastern authors bestow upon the ruler of the Rus the title of 'khan' – a ritual king, a living idol – so too does Helmold state that, amongst the Slavs, the inhabitants of Rügen are 'the only ones who have a king'. However, as Hilferding notes here, since Helmold himself generously bestowed the title 'rex' upon the rulers of other Varangian peoples, it is evident that this phrase implies a special status for the ruler of Rügen specifically. He, writes Alexander Fomich, 'acquired religious significance and, under the patronage of the gods, rose above all other Baltic princes. He may *not even have been called a prince, but bore the highest title*
'. It is not difficult to understand that this title was (most likely borrowed from the Avars) the title of khagan. Firstly, the Slavic world knew of no higher title than that of prince or king, other than khagan. Tsars would appear among the Slavs much later, in other regions. And there is no evidence whatsoever that the title of tsar was known on the southern shore of the Baltic at that time. Gilferding's supposed 'Caesar' turned out, as we recall, to be Zaezery upon closer inspection. Secondly, of all the titles known to the Slavs, it was precisely the title of khagan that had 'religious significance' (once upon a time, 'prince' had this meaning, but by Helmold's time the word had already become associated with military leaders). And finally, thirdly, we have a direct reference to the 'khagan' of Rügen. The Anglo-Saxon poem 'Widsid' mentions, among other rulers of northern Europe,
the 'Hagan', ruling over the 'Holm-Rugians', that is, the Rugians and Rus on the island. In light of the above, there are grounds to believe that 'Hagan' in this instance is not a name, as is commonly assumed, but a title mistaken for a name (in the same list, the 'Greeks'—the Byzantines—mention a man named Kjar—'Tsar'—ruling; the Franks mistook the title of the Avar khagan for a name).

28 This 'not only' points to some special ties between the Vagri and the island Rusyns. To whom were they closer – to the Obodrites or to the Veleti, from whom they were separated by a strait? I fear it will not be easy to establish this now.

*The Cliffs of Rügen*

Legend has it that the white cliffs of Rügen tested those who wished to become rulers. At the summit of a huge chalk cliff stood the prince's throne – and the pretender had to climb up there from the sea, demonstrating not only physical prowess, which was of course important for a leader in that harsh era, but also willpower, courage and self-control. One might say that Rügen was ruled by mountaineers.

It is interesting that, despite such religious reverence for the prince, he was granted very little real power, both on Rügen and in other Varangian lands. On the one hand, he was constrained by age-old customs and rituals upheld by the priests; on the other, by the will of the veche, the people's assembly, whose voice was heard in every Varangian town. At times, veche gatherings were even convened during wars.

Little can be said about the priests who served the living God of the island of Rus, apart from their influence. They dressed in long-tailed robes and wore 'long hair and *a beard*, *contrary to popular* custom' – that is, exactly as we have seen on the figurines supporting the Krod altar. In exactly the same way, clad in a long-sleeved robe and with long hair, a sorcerer is depicted in the Rus' chronicle, in an illustration of the events of 1071, when the sorcerer roused the entire city in the name of the old gods, and was treacherously killed during negotiations by a blow from an axe concealed beneath the Christian prince's cloak. The sorcerer is depicted as bearded and long-haired in another drawing, in which the prince's governor, Jan Vyshatich, is torturing captive priests.

*A Slavic priest*

So which idols were worshipped in the temple-cities of the island of Rus'?

Here is what Saxo Grammaticus has to say about the main temple of the island's capital, Arkona[29] .

'The city of Arkona,' he writes, 'lies atop a high cliff; from the north, east and south it is protected by natural defences... on the western side it is protected by a high embankment 50 cubits high... In the centre of the city lies an open square, on which stands a wooden temple, a work of fine craftsmanship, but revered not so much for the splendour of its architecture as for the greatness of the god to whom an idol was erected here. The entire exterior of the building was adorned with skilfully crafted bas-reliefs of various figures, though they were painted in a hideous and crude manner. There was but a single entrance to the interior of the temple, which was surrounded by a double enclosure: the outer enclosure consisted of a thick wall with a red roof; the inner one – of four sturdy columns which, not forming a solid wall, were draped with carpets reaching down to the ground, and were joined to the outer enclosure only by a few arches and the roof. In the temple itself stood a large idol, taller than a man, with four heads on as many necks, two of which extended towards the chest and two towards the spine, but in such a way that of the two front and two rear heads, one looked to the right and the other to the left; its hair and beard were cut short; and in this, it seemed, the artist had followed the custom of the Ruyans. In its right hand, the idol held a horn made of various metals, which was usually filled with wine each year by the priest, for divining the fertility of the coming year;

29 Arkona was excavated at the beginning of the 20th century. The remains of a two-metre-thick wall and four columns were found, which apparently enclosed the Holy of Holies… But now the cliff on which the temple stood has finally been swallowed up by the sea. Perhaps that is for the best. A sacred site has no need to become a tourist attraction for idlers and fools.

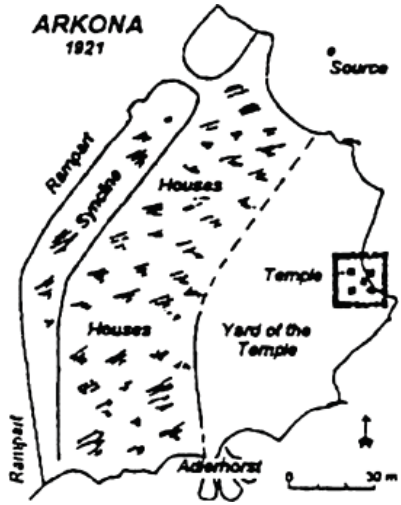
The left arm, with which the idol rested on its side, resembled a bow. The outer garment reached down to the shins, which were fashioned from various types of wood and so skilfully joined at the knees that only upon close inspection could the joints be discerned. The feet stood level with the ground; their base was set beneath the floor. A short distance away, the idol's bridle and saddle could be seen, along with other accessories; what struck the observer most of all was a sword of enormous size, whose scabbard and hilt, apart from their beautiful carved forms, were distinguished by exquisite silver inlay... To maintain the idol, every inhabitant of the island, regardless of gender, contributed a coin. They also gave him a third of their spoils and plunder, believing that his protection would bring success; moreover, at his disposal were three hundred horses and as many horsemen, who handed over to the high priest everything they had obtained by force or cunning; from this, various temple decorations were made; the rest was kept in chests under lock and key; in them, besides a vast quantity of gold, lay many purple garments, though rotten and threadbare from age. One could also see here a multitude of public and private gifts, offered as pious vows by those seeking aid, for the whole Slavic land paid tribute to this idol. Even neighbouring rulers sent him gifts with reverence: amongst others, King Svenon of Denmark ( )(30), to appease him, presented a cup of the most exquisite workmanship... This god also had temples in many other places, administered by priests of lesser rank. Furthermore, he had a horse, entirely white, from whose mane or tail it was considered an act of impiety to pluck a single hair. Only the high priest was permitted to feed it and ride it, so that ordinary riding might not degrade the divine animal. It was believed that on this horse Sventovit waged war against the enemies of his sanctuary; this followed from the fact that the horse, having stood in the stable at night, was often covered in the morning with foam and mud, as if it had returned from a long journey. Sventovit had his own battle standards (Signa) or banners. The most important of these was called Stanicia. 'It was,' says Saxo, 'distinguished in size and colour and revered by the people of Rügen almost as much as the majesty of all the gods. Carrying it before them, they considered themselves entitled to plunder all that was human and divine, and deemed everything permissible. With it, they could lay waste to cities, destroy altars, make the wrong right, destroy and burn all the Ruyan household gods—and the power of this small piece of cloth was greater than that of the prince." There, in the temple, either an eagle consecrated to God dwelt, or military insignia in the form of eagles were kept.

*Prince Gleb and the Magus*

30 In all likelihood, Svein the Bearded, who restored the worship of the ancestral gods to his land.

*Arkona through the eyes of Stanislav Yakubovsky*

*Arkona through the eyes of K.D. Friedrich*




*Arkona. Excavation plan*

*Arkona today*

Could these be the ‘aquilae’ of the defeated Roman legions, sent to the sacred island by Radagaisus-Radegast or some other conqueror of the Romans?

After the harvest, Saxon reports, the island’s inhabitants would sacrifice livestock to their idol and eat the sacrificial meat. The high priest would enter the inner sanctum of the temple, where Sventovit himself stood, normally veiled by red cloths. Only he had the right to enter there – and even he dared not breathe whilst inside. He had to hold his breath, catching his breath only once he had stepped out into the open air.

*Worship of Sventovit. Ivan Bilibin.*

By the level of wine poured into the horn held in the statue's hand, the priest would predict the following year's harvest – if the wine was low, the priest would instruct the people to stock up. If, however, the wine sloshed right up to the rim of the horn, he would say that all would be well.

It must be said that although I do not care for so-called 'rational' interpretations – as Chesterton put it, those who call themselves rationalists are not those who know how to think, but those who are convinced that no one else knows how to think – I shall venture to put forward one such interpretation here. The level of the wine depended directly on the rate of evaporation, on the dryness or humidity of the air – and this is directly linked to the weather, and therefore to the harvest.

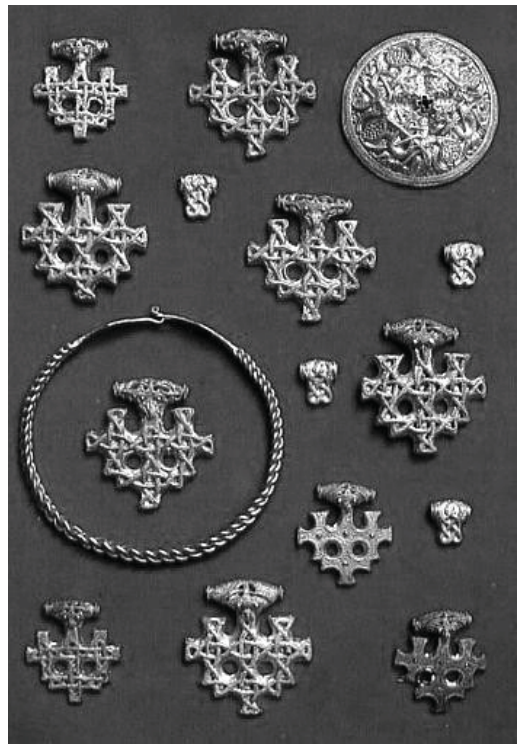
After this, the horn was emptied as the priest offered blessings for himself and the entire Varangian coast, then refilled – and placed back in the idol's right hand.

On another festival – we can assume this was the winter solstice – a huge cake was brought into the temple. Apparently, the cake was made from portions of honey, flour and other ingredients sent by all the communities and tribes. Hiding behind the cake, the priest asked whether he could be seen. Regardless of the answer, he would proclaim: 'May he not be seen next year!' This expressed the wish for a good harvest the following year.

After this, the sacrificial feast would begin.

In addition to the priests, three hundred horsemen were ever-present at the temple of Sventovit, ready at any moment to fight any enemy, carrying out the will of the four-faced God. Their spoils went to the temple not in part, but in full.

*The sacrificial chalice, Rügen*



*The treasures of Arkona. The regalia of the priest or sacred king*

Such was the sanctuary of Arkona. There was another temple-city on Rügen – Korenica, surrounded almost entirely by impassable marshes and swamps (Ibn Rusta also speaks with horror of the swamps of the 'Island of the Rus'). Apart from the temples, there were also houses there – to the amazement of the Christian Danes who entered them, *three-storeyed ones*. In Denmark, however, a two-storey house (specifically a house, not a castle or a church) was a rarity at that time.

‘The distinguishing feature of this city [Korenitsa] was three buildings of outstanding churches, notable for the brilliance of their superb craftsmanship. The dignity of the local gods enjoyed almost the same veneration as among the Arkonians – the authority of a public deity. …

<...The largest temple stood within the courtyard, but instead of walls it was enclosed by purple curtains, whilst the roof rested solely on columns. The ministers [of the church], having broken down the courtyard fence, set about removing the inner curtains of the temple. When these too were removed, the statue carved from oak, known as Rugevit, was revealed in all its ugliness from every angle. The swallows, which had built their nests beneath its lips, had covered its chest with droppings. A worthy god, whose image is so hideously defiled by birds! Moreover, at his head were seven human-like faces, all covered by a single skull. The craftsman depicted the same number of swords in their scabbards, suspended from his side. The [god] held an eighth, unsheathed [sword] in his hand; clenched in his fist, it was firmly fastened with an iron nail, so that it could not be removed without being cut through, as its dissection revealed. Its width was greater than a man’s height, whilst its height was such that [Bishop] Absalon, standing on tiptoe, could barely reach its chin with a hatchet...>

*Slavic Mansions. Stanisław Jakubowski*

This god was worshipped, just like Mars, as the leader of the forces of war. There was nothing amusing about this sculpture[31] , which aroused revulsion with the crude features of its grotesque carving.”

If Volyn-Vineta was the embodiment of enterprise and wealth, then upon the white cliffs of Arkona rested the spirit of Power – earthly power and spiritual power, the spirit of warriors and priests. Much can be said about Volyn-Vineta – but very little about the temples or life

31 An interesting observation. What would the most honourable Saxon say to someone who found the crucifixion or the image of Christ the Judge in the icons of the Last Judgement ‘amusing’?

his prince. On the contrary, on Rügen we hear only of temples and princes.

Perhaps the attentive reader has already asked themselves: why do I speak of Sventovit, Triglav and Radigast as idols and images, rather than gods?

The distinctive nature of the mythology of the Baltic Slavs has at times baffled researchers. The gods of Rügen, Volhynia, Szczecin and Radigast seem to be something entirely separate from the pantheons of other Slavic peoples. We know of no worship of Sventovit, Rugevit, Porenut, Porivit, Radigast, Triglav, Podaga and others beyond the southern shores of the Baltic.

Do they owe their existence to some pre-Slavic population of the Baltic coast? This is highly doubtful. The names Sventovit, Radigost and Triglav clearly sound Slavic. Neither they nor any of the others appear in the myths and legends of neighbouring non-Slavic peoples – the Germanic, Scandinavian, Celtic or Baltic peoples.

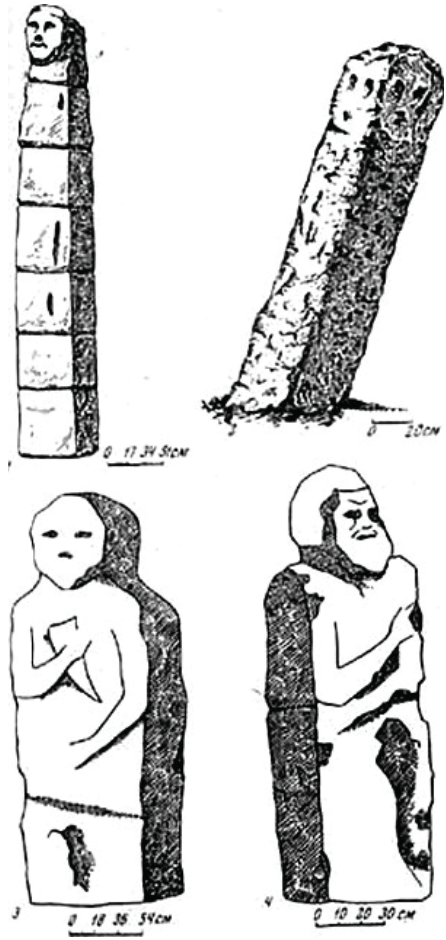
One might expect the formation of a distinct pantheon, unknown anywhere else, from some remote, isolated corner, tucked away in the forests, marshes, mountains and so on – among foreign peoples – but certainly not from the Baltic Slavs, who were in contact with the whole world, and with their kinsmen in the south and east in particular. It is known that pilgrims came from Bohemia to the altars of Rügen and Radigost-Retra; we know for certain how the Baltic Slavs are linked to the northern branch of the Eastern Slavs – by the closest ties of language, anthropology and material culture. Nevertheless, there is not a trace of the names of Baltic-Slavic deities either in Bohemia or in Rus'.

On the other hand, we find in the rites and customs of these deities—unknown to the rest of the Slavic world—features familiar throughout virtually the entire Slavic territory. Just as the priest of Sventovit in Arkona hid behind the ritual bread from the other priests and worshippers, asking if he could be seen – so too did householders in Bulgaria and Ukraine do at Christmas (and originally, most likely, at the winter solstice). And the role of the bread was played by a pile of pies. Just as they used to tell fortunes using a horse and spears in Radigoshche, Arkona and Szczecin, Russian girls would divine their future husbands – the boys would lay out their shafts in the yard, and the girl would lead a horse over them, watching whose shaft and which hoof the prophetic horse would touch – to determine whom she would marry and what life with him would be like.

These multifaceted sculptures are found not only on the shores of the Varangian Pomor region. Three of them were discovered in western Ukraine, two of which are the famous Zbruch idol and the idol from Ivankovitsy, found not far from it.

The third idol, from Husiatyn, not far from Zbruch, was not so fortunate – the peasants who found it in 1875, at the instigation of a priest, smashed the image of the deity to pieces and used them to build a chapel. Nor has the four-faced idol found in Belarus survived. Statues 'looking in all four directions' are also known in Russia. In old Ryazan, beneath the Spassky Cathedral dating from the mid-12th century, a bronze four-faced figurine was found – though it may well have been three-faced – with only the central face and parts of the side faces surviving. I used to think that this pagan relic was hidden away in the storerooms – how else could one explain the fact that we see no images of it in any book on Russian paganism? However, upon visiting the museum in the Ryazan Kremlin, I was astonished to discover that no one is even thinking of hiding the idol. It is displayed in a showcase that greets visitors as soon as they reach the landing of the staircase leading to the first hall on the tour. Indeed, why hide it?

'We are lazy and not curious' – this trait, noted as long ago as by A.S. Pushkin, works more reliably than any special storage facility.

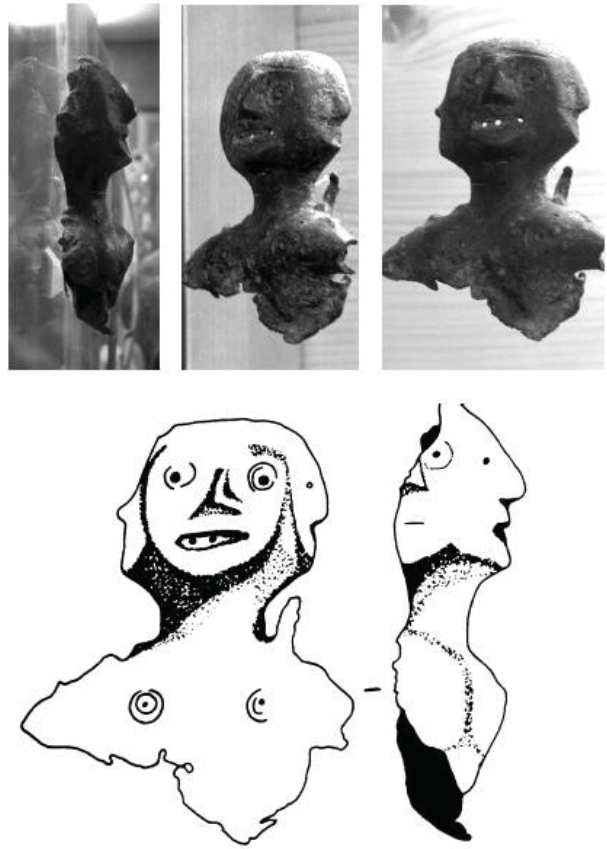


*The idol from Ivankovits*

The same applies to the so-called ‘Bogolyubskaya capital’. The Bogolyubov exhibition at the Vladimir-Suzdal Museum-Reserve features a mysterious stone, which appears to have once crowned a stone pillar. On each face of the ‘capital’ is a female (?) face (the features of all four faces are heavily worn away) resembling a halo. Researchers have put forward a wide variety of hypotheses regarding this stone. They have agreed that it is

a ‘capital’... but the capital of what? A piece of stone with four faces is more than just another of Bogolyubov’s capitals, and as for the theory that it crowned one of the pillars of the hypothetical narthex of the Church of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary... But where, then, are the rest? And the narthex itself is

‘hypothetical’, and it’s hard to add anything to that.

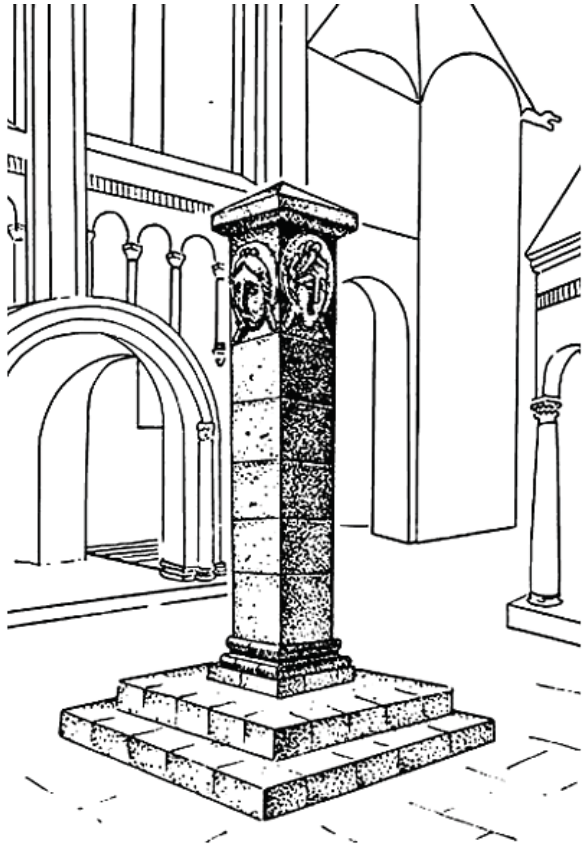


*The Ryazan idol. Photograph and sketch.*

G.K. Wagner put forward an original hypothesis – that the capital supposedly crowned a free-standing ‘pillar of the Mother of God’. However, all analogies to such a strange manifestation of the cult of the Mother of God are found very far from Rus’, and even there, to put it mildly, they are not typical.

*The Bogolyubov ‘capital’ (photographs)*

In the 19th century, the four-faced sculpture was built into the wall of the Monastery of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, but it appears to have been an object of worship long before that – the stone faces, according to scholars, have been damaged by countless touches and kisses. It is quite possible, however, that the countless kisses merely finished off and smoothed over the work of Christian vandals.



*The Bogolyubov 'capital' (reconstruction by G.K. Wagner)*

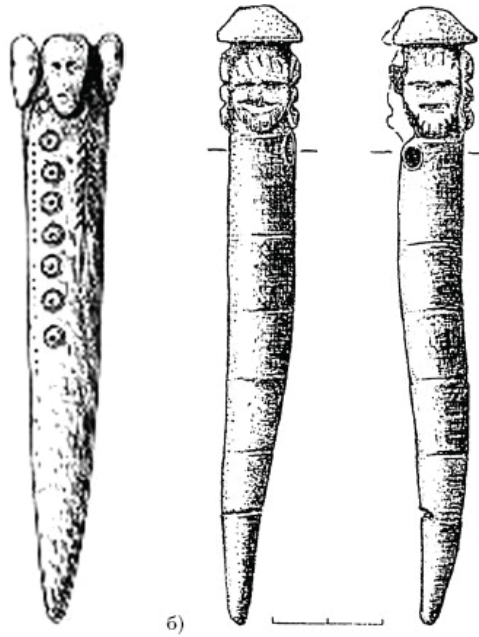
In my view, such a fate points rather to a different origin for the so-called 'capital'. Pagan shrines, idols and revered stones venerated by the people were very often built into the walls of churches, monasteries and chapels – for instance, in 1788 there were plans to embed the famous Blue Stone, situated not far from Bogolyubov near Pereyaslavl-Zalessky, into the foundations of a church under construction. Let us also recall the fate of the Husiatyn sculpture. On Rügen, incidentally, an image of a beardless, moustachioed man wearing a cap and holding a huge horn is embedded in the wall of the church in Altenkirchen – clearly a pagan shrine. Might the so-called 'capital' also have been part of a pagan idol, 'appropriated' by the church?

To me, dear reader, such an explanation seems more plausible than the theories of researchers who construct for it either hypothetical porticoes or even more hypothetical 'pillars'. Some may be puzzled by the halo-like circles above the heads of the 'capital' – but Russian art of those centuries offers examples of deliberately pagan figures, such as winged bird-maidens ('vil'), being depicted with halos.

*An idol from Altenkirchen set into a church wall*

Among the South Slavs, we find very small four-faced bone idols – in Bulgaria (Preslav) and Macedonia (the village of Chucher near Skopje). In Preslav, the idol was found in 10th-century strata – could it be that the Russian Prince Svyatoslav the Brave, who travelled to Bulgaria and visited Preslav in those years, or one of his retinue, lost his patron? Both South Slavic 'Sventovits' have a hole in the 'neck' area (presumably for wearing on a cord) and a sharp point at the end (obviously for sticking into the ground during the ritual). In general, three- and four-faced depictions of deities are found outside the Varangian coast, and quite frequently.

Not long ago, L.S. Klein put forward the theory that the deities of the Slavic Pomor region were, so to speak, deified 'feudal rulers' of these peoples. Leaving aside the irresponsible use of the term 'feudal', it is worth noting that it is hardly conceivable that deified military leaders could become supreme deities, such as Sventovit. It is even more difficult to explain in this way the three heads of Triglav, the four of Sventovit, the five of Porenut and Porevit, and the seven of Rugevit.




*Idol: a) Bulgarian; b) Macedonian*

In my view, the explanation here is quite straightforward. We know of these gods from Latin monks, and they may well not have distinguished the name of the depicted god from... the name of the image!

Indeed, in any developed cult – and the cult of the Baltic Slavs was undoubtedly developed – there are certain canons for the depiction of a particular deity, and these canons vary. And often a particular canon acquires a specific name – thus, Apollo might be Musagetes holding a lyre, or Sauroctonus striking a serpent; Shiva – the dancing six-armed Nataraja or the two-armed Mahayogin frozen in the lotus pose. Sometimes the name was derived from the location of the main temple dedicated to a particular form of the deity – such as Artemis of Ephesus – or from the most striking feature of the depiction – such as Apollo the Four-Armed.

Hilferding mentions that the Baltic Slavs avoided mentioning the names of the gods in vain, replacing them with their attributes... So, perhaps the same trait applies here? Instead of the name of God, the Slavs would say – especially in the presence of strangers of a different faith – 'Triglav' (the Three-Headed One), or 'Radigost' (He Whose Idol stands in the town of Radigost). To take a closer example, consider Our Lady of Vladimir and Our Lady of the Three Hands. The parallels are quite striking.

I believe this is the explanation that comes closest to the truth. The Baltic Slavs had no distinct deities of their own, but rather the names of idols – and it may well be that, for example, Radigost and Sventovit represented one and the same God[32] .

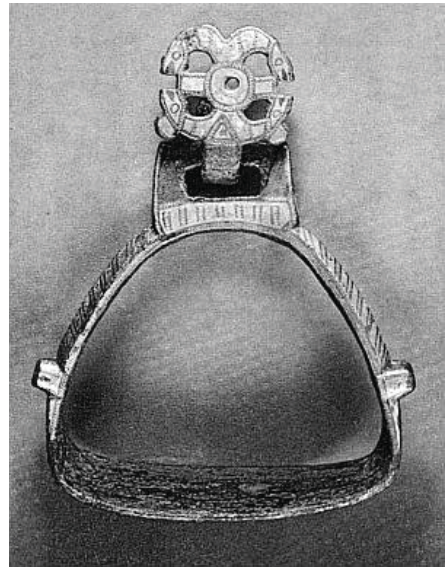
As for the true names of most of these deities, I fear we shall never know them. Simply, judging by certain details – for example, the name for Thursday 'Perundan' among the Polabians, or the towns named Perun on maps of these lands from 1240, or the obvious similarity between Yarovit and the East Slavic Yarila, or the designation of Radigost as Svarozhich in some sources – we can surmise that the same

32 axe, the eagle and the bull's head of Radegast – symbols of Perun – were also venerated in the Varangian Pomor region. On the other hand, Sventovit bears a strong resemblance to Perun; his festival – held after the harvest, just like Perun's – falls after St. Elijah's Day, eagles are associated with him, and the linguist V.N. Toporov mentions the four heads of the Lithuanian counterpart to our Perun – Perkūnas.

Deities, just as in other Slavic lands.

Therefore, to anyone asking where in Russia the ‘god Sventovit’ or the ‘god Radegost’ might be found, feel free to reply: exactly in the same place as the goddesses ‘Heavenly Queen’, ‘Mother-Intercessor’, ‘Mother of God’, ‘Sign’, ‘Vladimir’ and ‘Softening of Evil Hearts’.

Having discussed the cult of Varangian Rus’, let us say a few words about the art of warfare. We will have to talk about battles and wars constantly here – and much has already been said – so we shall note just a few details. Firstly, a distinctive feature of Varangian Rus’ was its cavalry – not as well-developed as that which had to be established in the lands of Kievan Rus’ in order to emerge victorious from skirmishes with nomads. For example, the inhabitants of Varangian Rus’ hardly ever used ‘draft’ horses – there was only one steed per warrior (the Germans speak with rapture of the beauty and stately bearing of Varangian steeds), which, however, did not prevent them from undertaking long mounted campaigns – the Obodrites, for instance, reaching as far as northern Italy on such campaigns. On the other hand, on the southern shores of what was then still the Venedic Gulf, spurs appeared very early on, followed by stirrups. Sventovit ‘fought the enemies of the Ruyan people’ on horseback, whilst, say, the Norse Odin merely rode on his famous Sleipnir. Coming down from the heavens to earth – we have already mentioned the horsemen of Arkona. The first instance of Danish ships transporting horses dates as far back as 1136. The ships of the Rügen Slavs were transporting cavalry as early as 1112 – if not earlier.



*Spurs, stirrups, and harness fittings of the Baltic Slavs*

The weapons of the Wends did not differ greatly from those of the Scandinavians – except that more attention was paid to the sword than to the axe, and we shall discuss this further when we turn to the Varangian craftsmen. So, incidentally, it would be better to speak not of ‘Scandinavian complexes’ where weapons resembling Scandinavian ones are found, but… well, at least of Baltic or Circumbaltic ones. Distinguishing a Wend from a Scandinavian by their weaponry is no easier a task than it is for an untrained person to tell, from a beshmet with gazyry, a burka, a papakha and a shashka, whether they belonged to, say, a Muslim Adyghe or an Orthodox Slav from the Terek Cossacks.

Moreover, even if you have found a source describing events that took place where ‘Scandinavian’ weapons were found, the words ‘Normans’ or ‘Vikings’

are far from always a guarantee that we are talking about ethnic Scandinavians.

I recently found a very interesting post online.

‘I would like to examine one word that is traditionally considered a Germanism in the Slavic languages, but which may, unexpectedly, turn out to be a Balto-Slavic loanword in the Germanic languages.

I am referring to the Proto-Slavic *vitędzь ‘warrior’, which is usually considered a borrowing from Proto-Germanic *wīkingaz (more precisely, from its forms in North-West Germanic dialects, to which, for example, the Old Norse _vнkingr – ‘Viking’ belongs).

The following points are noteworthy:

1. The etymology tracing the Proto-Slavic word back to Proto-Germanic has at least one significant formal flaw: the Germanic *wīkingaz would have yielded the Proto-Slavic *vicędzь. The *t in place of the expected *c is usually explained by the dissimilation of sibilant affricates (in order to distinguish *c [ts] from *dz, *c was ‘de-affricated’ to *t), but such an explanation is clearly ad hoc and does not seem very convincing.

2. The Proto-Slavic word has ‘counterparts’ in Old High German (_weiting – ‘warrior; member of the military nobility’ < *wītingīs) and Lithuanian (_vy~tis – ‘1. knight; 2. traditional (dating back to the coat of arms of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) depiction of a mounted warrior on the Lithuanian coat of arms'). The Old Prussian word is generally considered a Polonism or (more often) the same Germanism; opinions differ regarding the Lithuanian word (some consider it a native Lithuanian word, related to the verb _vɔti – 'to chase', hence the traditional translation of the image on the GDL coat of arms as 'chase', others regard it as a Germanism borrowed via Prussian or Slavic mediation). It is interesting that in both words we find the same _t_, the correspondence of which to the Germanic _k_ requires explanation.

3. Old Norse (Old Icelandic) _vнkingr – 'Viking' has no particularly convincing etymology (attempts have been made to explain it from Old Norse _vнk – 'small bay, fjord', Proto-Northwest Germanic *wīkaz 'settlement', borrowed from Latin
_uīcus – ‘settlement’, which is unconvincing from a semantic point of view, or Old Norse _vнg – ‘battle’, which is phonetically impossible; this leaves the explanation of a North European substratum word, which can hardly be called a clear etymology either). The earliest attestation of the word in North-West Germanic is from the 8th century (Old English _wīcing_).

4. The Proto-Slavic *vojь ‘warrior’ and *(po)vino,ti ‘to subdue’ are usually traced back to the same Proto-Indo-European *weiH – ‘to pursue’, as is the Lithuanian _vɔti – ‘to chase’. Thus, the Lithuanian _vy~tis – ‘warrior’, the Old Prussian *wītingīs ‘warrior’ and the Proto-Slavic *vitędzь ‘warrior’ (from the Early Proto-Slavic *wītingeh) may represent a common Balto-Slavic heritage and be traced back to a Balto-Slavic innovation – the creation of the word *wīt(ing)(j)as (morphological structure *wī-t(-ing)(-j)-as) ‘warrior’ based on the verbal root *wī’ – ‘to pursue, to wage war’ (< Proto-Indo-European *weiH – ‘to pursue’).

Thus, it cannot be ruled out that Old Norse _vнkingr – (like its Old English and Old High German counterparts, which apparently entered these languages from Old Norse) – is a West Baltic loanword (it is known that the Scandinavians interacted extensively with the Prussians; Old Prussian native words are characterised by the shift [t'] – [k']) or a West Slavic loan (from Proto-West Slavic dialects of the Proto-Krivichian type, in which the same phenomenon is observed). One can only speculate about the motivation for such a borrowing.”[33]

That is to say, I was, of course, aware even before that a Viking is not a nationality but a profession, and that the term was applied not only to ethnic Scandinavians[34] :

‘Then King Haakon sailed eastwards along the coast of Scania and ravaged

33 http://www.compagnia.ru/ice/read.php?f=1&t=142376&a=1

34 Therefore, talk of ‘Viking women’, ‘Viking gods’ or ‘Viking kings’ makes no sense whatsoever. One might just as well speak of ‘gangster women’ or a ‘gangster president’.

the country, took ransoms and tribute, and killed *Vikings* wherever he found them, both Danes and *Wends*.

(*'The Saga of Haakon the Good' from 'The Circle of the Earth' by Snorri Sturluson*)

'When they set sail eastwards, they were attacked by *Vikings*. These were *Estonians*."

(*'The Saga of Olav Truggvason'*)

It is worth adding to the last account that in medieval sources, the term 'Estonians' often referred not to modern Estonians, but to the Baltic Prussians. There are grounds to believe that a confusion of terms has occurred here as well – in any case, the leader of the 'Estonians' was a certain Clercon – a name that is not Estonian and for which there is no explanation in the Estonian language.

But here's the thing: even the word 'Viking' itself may turn out to be of Baltic or even Slavic origin, rather than Scandinavian or Germanic – I certainly didn't expect that!

Things aren't exactly plain sailing with the 'Normans' either.

Any study of historical documents will teach one 'not to trust one's own eyes', for very, very often there, 'on the cage with an elephant, you will see the inscription "buffalo"', to quote the immortal words of Kozma Petrovich Prutkov. Constantine Porphyrogenitus, in all seriousness, classifies the Avars as Slavs – whilst he refers to the Hungarians as Turks quite systematically. Other Arab authors count the Rus' among the 'Turks'. Many authors seem to distinguish the Goths from the Germans – including the Goth Jordan himself – even though the Gothic language was undoubtedly Germanic, both during the Roman Empire and in medieval Crimea. Not a single ancient source refers to the Britons or the people of Ireland—whose customs and legends form some 75 per cent of our understanding of the Celts, Celtic religion, mythology and society—as Celts or Gauls.

And so on, and so forth.

The word 'Normans' is also ambiguous; we are accustomed to seeing it as a name for a specific group of Scandinavians.

The origin of this name lies in the self-designation of the Norwegians – 'Norman', 'Normadr', meaning 'northern man'. But the further this word moves away from Norway, the more vague and generalised its meaning becomes. The Franks note that the Germans refer to both the Danes and the Swedes as 'Normans', that is, 'northern people'. The Frank Einhard writes the same – but the Franks are already broadening the meaning of this word, extending it to all peoples living 'beyond Denmark', as the Saxon Adam of Bremen notes, not without resentment. The Saxon had good reason to take offence – in the chronicle *Annals of the Kings of the Franks*, attributed to the same Einhard, under the year 798, the Saxons of Transalbinia, Adam's own kinsmen, are already referred to as Normans! In the writings of another Frank, Folquin, who died in 990, the Normans are referred to as the Nordalbings – another name for those same Transalbinian Saxons. And the erudite Rabanus Maurus refers to certain Marcomanni as Normans. Since the ancient Marcomanni, driven by the Romans into the lands of present-day Bohemia, had long since vanished by the 9th century, we need to ascertain whom the venerable Frank is referring to here. The German Helmold, who lived somewhat later, clarifies the situation: according to existing custom, the term 'Marcomanni' refers to peoples gathered from various quarters who inhabit a 'mark'. There are a great many such marks in *Slavic lands* as well. Among them, our Wagrian land is not the least of them, where there are men brave and experienced in battle.

So did the 'Marcomanni' include Slavs as well? And could the Franks have referred to the Wagrian-Obodrites as Normans too?

Yes, they could. And they did make use of this opportunity – not often, but still.

In the Fulda Annals, under the year 889, the northern Slavs are directly identified as Normans. In the same annals, the 'Normans' are blamed for the death of Bishop Markward, whilst the Hildesheim Chronicle reports that the bishop fell in battle against the Slavs. Four hundred years later, Matthew of Paris wrote in his chronicle under the year 836: 'The almighty

God sent hordes of fierce pagans—Danes, Norwegians, Goths and Swedes, *Wends* and Frisians; for a full 230 years they ravaged sinful England from one seashore to the other, slaughtering people and livestock, sparing neither women nor children' – here the Wends are also mentioned in the same breath as the Normans, though not named as such.

What follows from this observation? First and foremost, that the so-called 'Normanists' should not get unduly excited upon reading the term 'Normans' used by Italian authors (John the Deacon, Liutprand) to refer to the Rus' who attacked Byzantium. If the Franks, in all fairness, lumped together under this name the Scandinavians, the Saxons and the Baltic Slavs, then the Italians, as the saying goes, were simply following divine guidance. It was most likely from the Franks that the term 'Normans' for the 'pagan Rus' and Arabs who attacked Seville in 845.

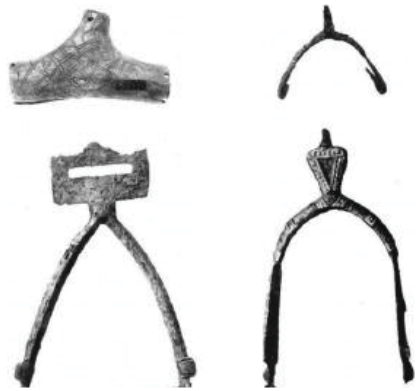
The only conclusion that can be drawn from all this is that the Rus' came to Byzantium and Spain from the north, possibly from the shores of the Baltic. However, their ethnic identity, their blood ties and linguistic kinship with the Norwegians, Swedes and Danes, cannot in any way be inferred from the designation 'Normans'.

It is interesting that the Belgian monk Sigibert, when transcribing Liutprand's account of Igor's campaign of 941, did not refer to the Rus' as Normans. He lived closer to the Baltic – and was better versed in this matter[35] .

While we are on the subject, a completely different detail in Liutprand's description of the Rus' is worthy of attention: he writes, 'we, however, call them Normans according to their place of residence. For in the Teutonic language 'nord' means 'north', and 'man' means 'man'; hence 'Normans', that is, 'people of the north'. Exactly – 'we call them by their place of residence' – and nothing more. But what is more interesting is this: 'we call them' and 'in the Teutonic language'. By the tenth century, four centuries had passed since the deacon's Lombard ancestors had arrived in Italy. These four centuries were spent at the very heart of Roman civilisation, Roman culture and the Roman Church. And yet – for Liutprand, writing in Latin, 'we' means 'in the Teutonic language'! By way of comparison, try to imagine Alexander Nevsky, for whom 'we' means 'in the Swedish language'! Yet by the 11th century, judging by the Novgorod birch-bark letters, 'the people of Novgorod, to this very day descended from the Varangians' were writing without a trace of Norman vocabulary and bore Slavic names almost without exception. Even I, for all my love of the Slavs, would not go so far as to claim that they were any more advanced than the Scandinavians in terms of civilisation and culture, any more than the Roman Empire, with its six-century history, was more advanced than the unwashed and unshaven Lombards. They certainly had no church that required them to pray to God in any specific language. But for some reason, if we are to believe the Normanists, they 'assimilated' the supposed 'Swedes' without a trace twice as quickly as Rome – *Rome*! – assimilated the Lombards.

But Normanists are far from such subtleties... It's not enough just to read with delight in an Italian or Arab text that the Rus' are, so to speak, 'Normans'. One has to think about it...

35 Incidentally, the same thing happened with the 'Varangians' in the Russian chronicles. The people of Novgorod knew who the Varangians were – and considered themselves 'of Varangian stock'. The Kiev chronicler, however, understood the word 'Varangians' just as broadly as the West Frankish 'Normans', and included the Scandinavian tribes within it.



*Chainmail links from Volyn-Jomsburg. Jomsviking armour*

Since we're on the subject of Vikings, let's also touch upon the Jomsvikings, whom we've already mentioned when discussing Volyn-Vineta-Jomsburg. What's interesting about them?

This military alliance emerged in the 10th century. The Jomsvikings were, as is clear, based in Jomsburg – in Volhynia. Several sagas mention their adventures, including one dedicated specifically to them. When you read it, the names all seem to be Scandinavian – Bui, Vagn, Sigurd, Skeggi, Aki, and the like. The same pattern is repeated in other sagas recounting the Jomsvikings. Yet in all the skaldic poems describing the wars against the Jomsvikings, the account is different:

> ***The Vends'*** chain mail was
> blackened by soot...
> ...
> ***The Wends***
> descended from all
> sides. The
> giantesses' teeth are
> grinding... (*The*
> *Saga of Olaf, son of*
> *Truggva*
> *from 'The Circle of the Earth'*)
>
> Hear this song, Prince's heir, of how
> you bore the red shield against ***the***
> ***Wends***. You launched the Indeveli
> Keel upon the water.
> Then came the misfortunes ***of the***
> ***Wends***. I know of no other chieftain
> who led more ships to their pastures,
> ploughing through the waves. (*The*
> *Saga of Magnus the Good*)

As we have already established when discussing King Visbur, the skaldic verses in the sagas are the oldest part. Moreover, they are often the source of the sagas themselves – initially, in response to some event – a battle, a feat, a quarrel – the skaldic poet composes a short poem – a 'visu'. A visu can be laudatory (drapa), or quite the opposite (nid). It was with the help of these verses that storytellers committed to memory the sequence of events, the backbone of the story, onto which they later built the 'flesh' of the prose narrative. After all, verses are easier to remember than prose.

So, if the skalds' poems say that the Vikings of Yumna-Jomsburg were Wends, then that is exactly what they were – at least, for the most part.

The founder of the Jomsburg Viking brotherhood was a certain Palnatoki. A.G. Kuzmin refers to him as a 'local resident' of Jomsburg, that is, a Wend. A.S. Khomyakov also considered Palnatoki to be a Slav. In the saga of the Jomsvikings, Palnatoki was born on the island of Funen off the coast of Jutland – the very same island which, according to Saxo Grammaticus, was conquered by the Wends – I asked you to bear this fact in mind, as you can see, for good reason.

Well then, if the bearer of this strange name—which has no parallel either in runic inscriptions or in the sagas—was indeed a Slav, one can only rejoice at this. And I am referring not only to his engineering skills, the fruits of which I have already mentioned when discussing the fortifications of Jomsburg (it is to him that the saga attributes their construction). Palnatok was also the lawgiver of the Jomsvikings' confederation, the Lycurgus of this, as they used to say in Germany at a certain time, 'Northern Sparta':

'Following this, Palnatoki, on the advice of wise men, issued the Laws of Jomsborg, designed to enhance the glory and power of that city as much as possible. The first part of the laws stated that no man could become a member of the retinue here if he was over 50 or under 18; members of this retinue must be of an age between these years. When someone wishes to join them, blood ties are not taken into account. No man has the right to flee from any enemy, even if the enemy is as valiant and well-armed as he is. Every member of the retinue is obliged to avenge another as he would his own brother. No one may utter a word of fear or show fear, no matter how dire the situation may be. Any valuables, without distinction—whether small or large—that they obtain on a raid must be brought to the banner; and whoever fails to do so must be banished; no one has the right to cause strife. If any news arrives, no one must rush to repeat it to everyone and anyone, for only Palnatoki announced the news there.

*The ships of the Yomsvikings*

None of them was to keep a woman in their town, and no one was to be absent from the town for more than three days. And if a man joined their ranks who had killed the father, or brother, or another relative of a member of their band, or the man himself, and when this became known after his acceptance into the local band, then Palnatoki had the right to the final say, as with any other disagreement arising among them.

Thus they lived in the town and strictly observed their laws. Every summer they went on raids into various lands and gained renown. They were considered great warriors, and they had few

equals at that time. They were known as the ‘Jomsvikings’.

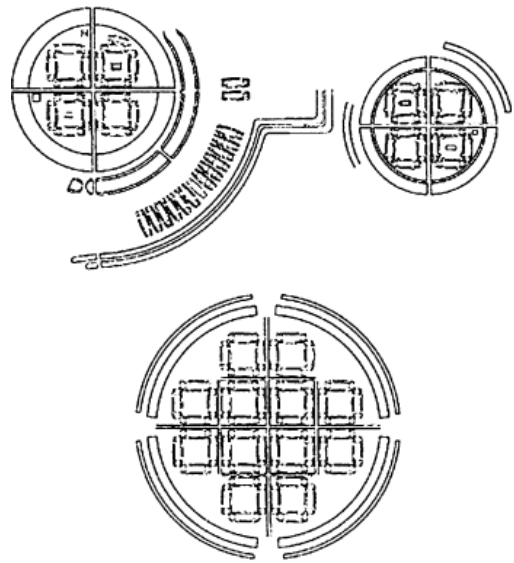
*The Jomsvikings in battle*

Perhaps the attempt to establish – over a hundred years before the Crusades, in the pagan Baltic region (Palnatoki himself was a staunch pagan) – a genuine order of knights is no less remarkable than the construction of an arch across the strait and towers with catapults by a native of the Danish Islands. At that time, the pinnacle of Danish architecture was the Very Large Semi-Dugout (for the konung; the yarls made do with simply large ones; the bondsmen with mere dugouts; and the treli slaves, if they had dwellings at all, lived in dugouts without any ‘semi’ part).

Unfortunately, the brotherhood of the Yom knights did not outlive its founder for long. In 990, Palnatoki died; he was succeeded by the Swede Sigwaldi, and discipline in the fortress began to slip (the first measure being a ban on young women being present within the fortress). The Jom Alliance fell into decline, and military defeats soon followed. In the 11th century, Europe’s first order of knights—founded by a pagan Wend on Wendish soil—came to an end, having lasted only a short while and failing to survive for even a few decades before the emergence of its Christian counterparts.

Another phenomenon of the Viking Age is directly linked to the Wends – the so-called round camps in Denmark: Trelleborg (there are two fortresses by this name), Fyrkat, Aggersborg, Borgeby and Nonnebakken. As one might easily guess, these names are of later origin. Each of these fortifications consists of a circular rampart with four gates. Two streets divide the interior of the fortress into four sectors in a cross-shaped pattern. Within each quarter stands a square formed by four long houses. In Aggersborg, there are as many as three such squares in each quarter. Archaeologists believe that a watchtower stood at the crossroads. By the standards of the early Middle Ages, the ramparts are a marvel of geometric precision, with a deviation from a perfect circle of no more than half a per cent. ‘Slavic fortifications were also circular. The Danes are known to have had close ties with their neighbours – the Baltic Slavs,’ remarks A.Y. Gurevich regarding these fortifications; he is a figure who, it would seem, cannot be suspected of Slavic nationalism, nor, for that matter, can another author, Joachim Herrmann, who pointed to the Moravian origin of the architecture of the so-called ‘Viking camps’. In Trelleborg, Slavic pottery accounts for about 80 per cent, clearly showing the exact origin of the ‘Vikings’ who inhabited it. The burials near the ‘Viking camps’ are almost

exclusively male – which leads archaeologists to recall the ‘Saga of the Jomsvikings’. The circular fortifications are seen as analogous to Jomsborg – which once again links them to the Wends. Sometimes the circular camps are associated with the alliance formed by the Danish kings Harald Bluetooth[36] and his son Sweyn Forkbeard against the Germans. In 983, Harald, with the help of the Obodrite-Rerici, drove out the troops of the Holy Roman Empire that had invaded southern Denmark. It is possible that the ‘Viking camps’ (given the origin of this word, we may continue to refer to them as such) served as strongholds for the Slavic allies of the Danish kings – and the Danes would continue to rely on the assistance of the druzhinas from the Slavic Pomerania until the end of the 11th century. It is no coincidence, then, that chroniclers of the Frankish kingdom included the Slavs amongst the Normans.



*Diagrams of Viking camps in Denmark*
*Top left: Trelleborg; right: Fyrkat; bottom: Aggersorg*

Let us now turn to the role of Varangian Rus’ in Baltic trade. Here, as the saying goes, every cloud has a silver lining – after the Arabs captured Gibraltar in the 8th century, and their corsairs made sailing the Mediterranean far too dangerous even for the risk-taking merchants of the Middle Ages, the river routes of central Europe became more attractive (although even before that, amber, for example, had been transported to Roman markets via precisely these lands). Slavic merchants in the Baltic region were by no means trailing behind the Normans. On the contrary, hoards of silver Arab coins in the Slavic Baltic region, according to research by V. Yanin and J. Herrmann, date from the late 8th century, whilst the first Scandinavian hoards date from the late 9th! That is, a hundred years later. This alone makes it clear who was driving Baltic trade. It also shows who was the first to master the route from the Baltic to the East via Eastern Europe. And it is no coincidence that Rus’ was called Gardy or Gardariki in the Scandinavian sagas – in the Wendish language, unlike in Scandinavian, ‘gard’ meant not ‘farmstead’ or ‘fence’ at all, but specifically ‘city’! In north-western Poland, on what remains of the Wendish Pomerania, Stargard, Novogard and Bialogard still exist to this day. And so, the name Novgorod (Holmgard), the name of Kyiv (Kenugard), and the name

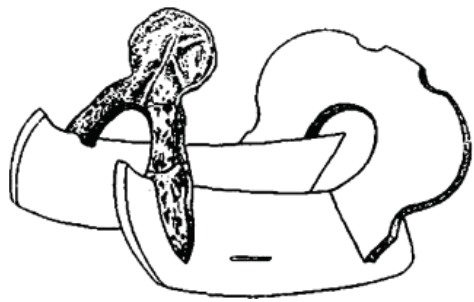
36 It was precisely from his nickname that the ‘Bluetooth’ communication system, developed in Denmark and Scania, took its name. Its symbol is a combination of the younger runes ‘Hagal’ (Harald) and ‘Berkana’ (Bletand).

The Normans first heard of Constantinople (Miklgard) from the Wends. The medieval Hanseatic League is well known to many. Few people notice that it included former Wendish cities with names that require no translation for Slavs – Bremen, Lübeck, Rostock. And… Novgorod. Yes, Novgorod was also part of the Hanseatic League. How can this strange alliance be explained, if not by the Wendish roots of Baltic trade, by ties that had formed even before the Viking era? Well, the foundations of the Wends' commercial prosperity were laid over many centuries. And they endured for a long time, after the demise of Wends' civilisation in the flames of
'Drang nach Osten', serving as the foundation for the Hanseatic League.

*Volyn. Scales and weights*

The dominance of the Slavic Wends in Baltic trade also left its mark on the Scandinavian languages. Elena Melnikova counts twelve Slavic loanwords in them (it should be noted that researchers, who are by no means averse to Norman influence, count between ten and six Scandinavian loanwords in Old Russian). And most of them relate to trade. Slavic merchants would arrive for trade (torgh) in boats (lodhia). It is curious that not a single word from the Normans' rich maritime vocabulary found its way into the Slavic languages. The Slavs had their own words for maritime affairs, which had emerged before the Viking Age, in those days when the voyage of the legendary King Hrolf the Jester from Denmark to Sweden was, for the Scandinavians, a journey to the ends of the earth. The chronicle refers to Oleg the Prophet's ships not as
'drakkars' or 'knorrs', but 'ships', from the Wendish korab. It is possible, incidentally, that the word 'korab' heard in the Novgorod epics is not a 'mispronunciation', but specifically the Wendish word. However, Slavic merchants might also have arrived on horseback, in saddles (sadul) with high bows (loka), carrying goods in saddlebags – kosh (katse). Upon arrival, they would settle down on benches (lava) and unpack their scales (besman) and goods: silks (silki), which arrived from the East along with Arab silver, and sable furs (sobel) from the Russian forests. Their journey, arduous and perilous, took them across numerous borders (graens), and the merchants were glad, after the trading was done, to rest and seal the deal with a mug of beer brewed with hops (humle[37] ).

37 To each his own – but for some reason, I am reminded of the strange name of the Hun ruler Humli from Anglo-Saxon poems. Prince Humle? Well, that's quite Slavic.



*The boat and saddle of the Varangian Slavs*

The borrowing of the word ‘skot’ in the sense of ‘money’: Gothic skatts ‘coin, money’, German schatz ‘wealth’, Old Saxon skat ‘coin, wealth’. It is quite clear that this word is older in the languages of those peoples for whom, apart from money, it denotes the very first, pre-monetary, so to speak, indicator of wealth, prosperity and well-being – livestock, domestic animals. It is easy to understand why ‘livestock’ came to denote money. The reverse transformation would be impossible to explain. Similarly, only the Frisian ‘cona’ can derive from the Slavic ‘kuna’ – a marten, a marten pelt, and finally, a monetary unit – but certainly not the other way round.

Just how popular the profession of merchant was in the towns – particularly amongst the people of Pomorye and Volhynia – is illustrated by this fact: when Otto of Bamberg baptised Pomorye, he had to baptise the town’s population in two stages – half were always away on business. However, half the population was still nothing out of the ordinary – in Kolobreg, the astonished preacher found himself in the midst of an almost deserted, seemingly dead town. Almost everyone had set off to trade on the islands.

The towns of Varangian Rus were home not only to merchants but also to skilled craftsmen. Unfortunately, like the civilisation as a whole, their creations are little known. They either remain completely obscure, like the Krod altar, or are attributed to Scandinavian craftsmanship, such as

a casket from Kamen. What a pity. Neither the jewellers nor the carvers of Varangian Rus' were in any way inferior to their much-hyped northern neighbours. As for their blacksmiths, they probably even surpassed them – it was not for nothing that Theodoric collected tribute from the Varni in the form of swords, whilst Charles-David 'the Great' specifically forbade the Wends, by a special decree of 805, from selling Frankish swords – I suspect not so much out of fear of arming them, but rather for fear that the Wendish blacksmiths would master the technology and begin forging such swords themselves. Let us also recall the long swords of the Wends at the Battle of Bravall.

*Coins of the princes of the Ruyans and Obodrites*

The history of Hedeby, the commercial and craft centre of Denmark in those days, is an interesting one. At the very beginning of the 9th century, the Danish konung Godfrey (according to other sources, Godric) routed the capital of the Obodrites and, having taken Prince Godlev (Godoslav) captive, had him hanged. The Danish leader, however, took the town's population – craftsmen and merchants – to his own land and settled them there. The settlement was named Hedeby.

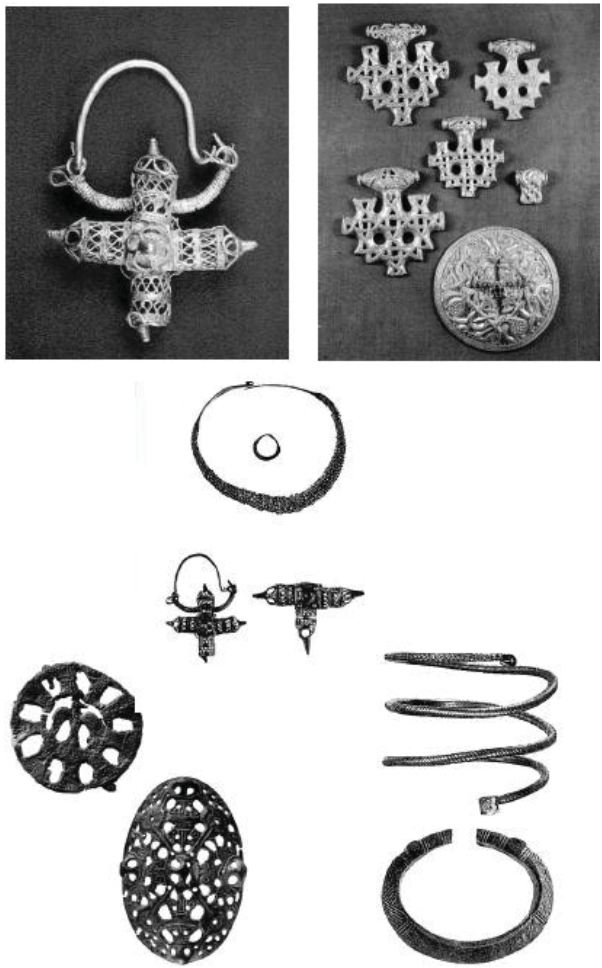
I wonder how many works by these captive Obodrite craftsmen appear in museum display cases and in the pages of books as 'typical examples of Scandinavian art from the Viking Age'?

Finally, I shall say a few words about the general way of life in the Varangian Pomorye.

Despite the multitude of towns and the bustle of the trade routes, the region was rich in all manner of wildlife. The biographer of Otto of Bamberg, not without a touch of sarcasm directed at his fellow monks, wrote: 'Monasteries could thrive in this country, especially for the holy men of our time who, aware of their frailty, prefer fertile land to bare rocks or a gloomy desert. There is an incredible abundance of fish, both in the sea and in the rivers, lakes and ponds: for a penny one can buy a cartload of fresh herring. The whole of Pomorye

abounds in all manner of game, namely: deer, bison and wild horses (i.e. elk?), bears and wild boars, as well as pigs and all manner of livestock. It is rich in butter from herds, milk from sheep, and lamb and mutton fat; moreover, it produces honey, all kinds of grain, hemp, poppies and various vegetables in abundance.' In short, only a thoroughly lazy person could fail to feed themselves in this country; that is why the Slavs regarded the beggars who wandered in among them with disdainful bewilderment, genuinely failing to understand what sort of person one must be to go begging. Moreover, the inhabitants of the Varangian shores were by no means mean-spirited; quite the opposite, in fact. We have already heard how Adam of Bremen spoke highly of the Slavs' hospitality and generosity, but here is what Helmold writes:

'Here I have seen for myself what I had previously known only by hearsay, namely that, when it comes to hospitality, no people are more worthy of respect than the Slavs. For in receiving guests, they are all, as if by conviction, so zealous that there is no need to ask anyone for hospitality. For whatever they obtain from farming, fishing or hunting, they distribute generously, and they regard anyone as all the more valiant the more lavish he is. A passionate desire to boast of this drives many of them to theft and robbery. In any case, these vices are forgiven among them, for they are justified by reference to hospitality. For according to Slavic law, it is prescribed that what you have stolen at night must be distributed to guests the next day. If, however, anyone—which happens very rarely—is found to have refused hospitality to a stranger, then his house and property may be set on fire, and all agree unanimously to this, calling him dishonourable, base, and despised by all, who was not afraid to refuse a guest bread.



*The work of jewellers in Varangian Rus'.*

This, incidentally, concerns the ruthless Vagr robbers. But here is what the same Helmold reports about the no less savage and stubbornly pagan inhabitants of Rügen: 'They are characterised by hospitality in all its fullness, and they show due respect to their parents. Among them one will never find a single person in need or a beggar, for as soon as illness renders any of them weak, or old age frail, they are entrusted to the care of an heir, so that he may support them with all humanity. For indeed, the virtue of hospitality and care for parents hold the foremost place among the virtues of the Slavs."

Here is what the author of the life of Otto of Bamberg writes about the generosity and hospitality of the Pomeranians: 'Honesty and camaraderie among them are such that, knowing absolutely nothing of theft or deceit, they keep their chests and boxes unlocked. Indeed, we saw neither locks nor keys there[38], and they themselves were greatly surprised to see our packs and boxes

38 However, archaeology tells us that such items did indeed exist amongst the Slavs. Apparently, there were chests that were, after all, locked. I wonder, with what?

locked. They keep their clothes, money and all their valuables in their barrels and tubs, simply covered with a lid, and they fear no deception, for they have never experienced it. And what is surprising is that their table is never empty, never left without food, and every head of the household has a separate house, neat and smart, intended solely for the purpose of regaining strength. There, the table is never empty of all manner of food and drink: when one thing runs out, another is brought forth.

What else can be said? It has already been mentioned that the Varangian Slavs cut their hair short (scissors are frequently found in excavations of their settlements) and, quite often, their beards (only the priests let theirs grow). In German miniatures, the Wends are easily recognisable by their ears, which are not covered by hair cut in a circle. And the Vele, as S. Gedeonov asserts, wore a tuft of hair on the crown of their shaved heads (a similar hairstyle is known from the Polish prince Kotyško, the Russian Svyatoslav, and the later Zaporozhian Cossacks).

There were many such customs, but they were, it seems, not particularly abused. Saint Boniface held up the fidelity of Wendish women as an example to his fellow believers. It was not uncommon for a wife to be sent to the funeral pyre alongside her husband; this was not an unquestionable requirement of custom, as in India, where a widow was not considered a human being, but rather an expression of love, a personal choice. A widow could quite happily remain alive and still be a fully respected member of society (a wealthy and respected widow of a certain warrior is mentioned in the ‘Life of Otto of Bamberg’). Women in general enjoyed considerable freedom; they could receive guests in their husband’s absence, conclude deals themselves, and act, so to speak, as legal entities. Indeed, one need only recall the three Slavic Amazons at Bravalla to understand that the status of women among the Wendish Slavs was quite free.

*Circular-cut Wendish idols*

We already know that the Velets used some form of writing. And it is impossible to imagine that the level of civilisation we see—large-scale trade deals, the construction of huge structures—could have existed without writing. Indeed, on the Varangian coast there are several inscriptions in the Younger Runes (that is, the runes of the Viking Age, as opposed to the more ancient twenty-four so-called ‘Older

runes'). Not all of them can be read in the Scandinavian way – and in some, there are symbols foreign to the Scandinavian runic script.

*Circular haircut, Germanic miniature*

In the 19th century, not far from Starigard, near the village of Kobelice, an urn containing the ashes of a cremated deceased person was found with the remains of a runic inscription. The word KSANSA can be clearly made out – that is, either 'prince' (cf. Polish 'książ'), or 'priest' (cf. Polish 'kseńdź'). The burial took place sometime between the 8th and 10th centuries – on the one hand, the younger runes had already replaced the older ones; on the other, the region had not yet been converted to Christianity and the dead were still being cremated.

According to the 17th-century German historian Konrad Schurzfleisch, the Wends continued to teach children the Wendish runes—derived from the younger Danish runes—in schools alongside the Latin alphabet even in his time. Evidently, as in Iceland, the final decline of the art of runes occurred during the Protestant era.

Strange as it may seem, apart from the Danish runes, the Wendish runes show the influence of what we now call the 'Cyrillic alphabet'. For example, the Latin letter p is represented by the symbol П in the Wendish runes.

To conclude the list of what was created, what was achieved, and how people lived in Varangian Rus' during its golden age, I would like to say a few words about the colonies it founded – both eastern and western. However, we have already touched upon the subject of the western colonies – both the military ones in Denmark and the peaceful ones in Holland. However, the matter did not end there. The migration of Slavs to the West via the Labe was of a far broader nature. The Slavs came to call Hamburg 'Gam' (from the Slavic 'Gam'), and Bremen – familiar to all from the cheerful fairy tale about the animal musicians – was founded by the Slavs. One need only listen closely to its name. As early as 736, a considerable number of Slavs, Stodorians

or Sorbs. In the north-western part of Bavaria, between Würzburg, Nuremberg and Bamberg, near the Main and along the entire course of the Radanica, entire Slavic regions emerged in the 8th and 9th centuries. In a document dated 846, this region is referred to as the land of 'the Slavs who live between the Main and the Radanica and are called the Main and Radanica Vinids'. Moreover, here too, it would seem, we encounter the same restless giants (and here, incidentally, is the answer to the question of how the Italian chronicler knew of them – it is not that far from Bavaria to northern Italy). To the south of the source of the Radanica, between Nuremberg and Donauwörth, there was a town with the strikingly familiar name of Wiltenburg (now Würzburg).

*Inscription from Kobelichi*

*Wendish runes*

In the first half of the 10th century (more precisely, in 937), in the Ory River basin, we find settlements with the names Pretalich, Bukov, Winidishenburgh (i.e. a Venetic, Slavic town), Belinichi, Dudichi, Velpuhi, Vsebor, etc. A few years later (in 956), Slavic settlers who had advanced westwards near Salzvedel formed something akin to the Lipan tribe, whose lands included Lyubim, Klinicheva, Seben, Kazina, Tulci and Kribci. Elsewhere, to the north of the Orya, the 'White Land' (Beleseim in German documents, later becoming 'Balsamia') emerged, with the settlements of Pelinici, Dudici, Zelici, Vuzboro, Valislav, Velbuzi, Klenovye, Verbno, Ust-Urye and others.

Wendish settlements could be distinguished very easily amongst the Frisian, Saxon or Thuringian ones – they retained one very noticeable feature, often right up to modern times, when their inhabitants had long since forgotten the language of their ancestors and could barely remember where they and their lineage had come from. That is to say, the feature could more accurately be described as the German villages built in straight lines. One column marches, two columns march… whatever you say, there are some things in the world that never change.

The villages of the Vends were built in a circular or horseshoe shape. The houses were arranged in a circle, with their solid walls facing outwards and their doors opening inwards. In the central square stood a pen for the communal herd, or 'yazba' – a building used for village assemblies (ordinary houses were called 'khata'), which was usually surrounded by a grove.

And again, one cannot assume that these settlements appeared in the 10th century, at the height of the religious war on the Elbe. Rather, these are monuments to the golden age of Varangian Rus', when the Varangians lived peacefully among the Frisians and Saxons, and the Varni and Thuringians were governed by a single law.

In addition to the southern (Bavaria), western (White Land, Lipyane, Holland, England) and northern (Denmark, southern and central Sweden) directions, Varangian Rus' also moved towards

east.

According to the Guta Saga, compiled on Gotland, as early as the 8th century Slavs from the southern shores of the Baltic Sea settled on the island and founded the town of Visby there (one cannot help but recall that in Polish, 'Wyspa' simply means 'island'). The synodic of the Minorite monastery in Visby, dating from the period 1279–1549, records numerous surnames that sound not merely Slavic but specifically Russian: Lyutov, Malhov, Beskin, Belin, Bozhepol and others[39] . As early as the 17th century, a Protestant pastor named Strelov lived on Gotland. In light of this information, the conflict that broke out around 1288 between the inhabitants of Visby and the rural population of Gotland takes on particular significance; Arsenyev attributes the cause of this conflict to tribal strife. Moreover, he notes, the townspeople were supported by the South Baltic cities, which were still essentially Slavic, whilst the Swedish king sided with the peasants and subdued Visby.

Even earlier, the Wends had penetrated the mouth of the Dvina.

A considerable number of Slavic 'finger-shaped' fibulae have been found in Latvia – according to archaeologist V.V. Sedov, clear evidence of Slavic penetration into this region in the 6th–7th centuries. The distribution of the finds indicates that the Slavs settled, first and foremost, amongst the Curonian tribes and came into contact with the Livonian tribe, a Finno-Ugric people. Evidence of this migration lies in the changes observed in Curonian culture at precisely this time, which cannot be explained by internal development alone. In the second half of the 6th century or at the turn of the 6th and 7th centuries (Sedov has not established the exact date), the Curonian custom of marking graves with stone wreaths completely disappears.

Burial grounds from the subsequent period emerged in new locations. The continuity between these and the burial grounds of the 1st–6th centuries had been seriously questioned. However, judging by the latest research by I. Virse (Ozere), a number of features of the burial ritual characteristic of the burial grounds of the first half of the 1st millennium AD can also be traced in the necropolises of the 7th–9th centuries, indicating that the Curonian population, for the most part, did not leave their lands. They had merely experienced some severe upheavals that forced them to abandon their old burial grounds (and, in all likelihood, settlements of the same period, which remain as yet unexamined). Chronologically, this event coincides precisely with the appearance of Slavic finger-ring brooches in the lands inhabited by the Curonians. It must be assumed that the migration of the Slavs into the lands of the South-Eastern Baltic and the cultural changes in the Curonian region are interrelated phenomena.

Local place names, as in the former Varangian lands of Germany, bear witness to the settlement and residence of Slavs in the western regions of Latvia and Lithuania. K. Buga had already considered the hydronym Venta (in the basin of this river, as shown below, Slavic Wends have been recorded) to be of Slavic origin. All attempts to explain the origin of this river name using Baltic linguistic evidence have proved unsuccessful. The German linguist V.P. Schmid independently reached the conclusion that the hydronym Venta is of Slavic origin. This conclusion was supported by O.N. Trubachev. Such a name is not unique in the south-eastern Baltic region (Venta – a headland near Klaipėda; Ventas Ragas – in the lower reaches of the Neman; Ventos and Ventina – north-west of Klaipėda; Ventin – a forest near Jelgava, Ventos Perkassa – in the Šiauliai district, Ventis – in Masuria). It is interesting that all these geographical names are concentrated in the region where, according to archaeological data, a Slavic population settled in the 6th–7th centuries.

K. Buga believed that not only the hydronym Venta, but also a whole series of other hydronyms, bear witness to the invasion of the Letto-Lithuanian lands in the 5th–6th centuries by a Slavic population (still in a Proto-Slavic linguistic state).

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39 Compare the surnames found in Mecklenburg – the former land of the Obodrites: Bibovs, Bibikovs (Mecklenburg: Bibow), Welzin (Mecklenburg), Glasow (Mecklenburg), Daschow (Mecklenburg), Demmin (Mecklenburg), Zurow (Mecklenburg), Carlow (Mecklenburg), Karpow (Mecklenburg), Kladovs (Mecklenburg: Kladow), Kobrovs (Mecklenburg: Kobrow), Krasovs (Mecklenburg: Krassow), Krechovs (Mecklenburg: Kreckow), Lubkovs (Mecklenburg: Lubkow), Lukovs (Mecklenburg: Lukow), Malzovs (Mecklenburg: Malzow), Maslovs (Low German: Masslow), Mirovs (Low German: Mirow), Perovs (Low German: Perow), Rakovs (Low German: Rakow), Rogovs (Low German: Roggow), Starkovs (Low German: Starkow), Shutovs (Low German: Schutow) and others.

Medieval written sources also mention the Wends who inhabited these regions. As recounted in the *Chronicle of Livonia* by Henry of Latvia, the Wends lived in Courland (Kurland) in the basin of the River Wenda (referred to in medieval written sources as Wenda, Winda, Venda, Vende; the modern-day Venta), from where they were driven out by the Curonians. For a time (even before the founding of Riga), the Wends lived on the Ancient Mountain (Mons Antiqus), but were driven out of there too by the same Curonians. Many of the Wends were killed in the process; those who survived fled to the Latgalians and settled among them. In 1206, the Order's priest Daniel from the Toreida region (modern-day Turaida), where the castle of one of the Livonian elders, Dabrėla (a name clearly of Slavic origin), was located, set out for the Wends with the aim of preaching Christianity. He was received kindly by them and baptised them. The 'Chronicle of Livonia' does not provide any details regarding the settlement of the Wends at that time. E. Pabst suggested that they settled in the vicinity of medieval Arras (now Araisi), not far from Venden, modern-day Cēsis.

There is another Venden in the Vik region, the Venta (Vindava) River, the localities of Vindele and Vinde; the settlements of Vindau and Venda; the 'Russian villages' of Vendekele and Vendever in the Vik region, mentioned in some documents, and so on.

In addition to the widely represented 'Vend' names, a number of names directly associated with the Rus' are also found in the south-eastern 'corner' of the Varangian Sea. For example, the sources mention the place names Russele (somewhere in the vicinity of Reval and the Vik region), Russen (Russchen) dorpe; Rutzow (Russov?) on the Courland coast in the Megowe region may also belong here.

North of Cesis (Venden), the most intriguing place name Rujena (Royen, Ruien) appears on both old and modern maps. A parallel with certain forms of the name of the island of Rügen – Ruyan, Ruya – suggests itself. Any doubts regarding the validity of this parallel are dispelled by old maps, on which this town is named Rugen. Another interesting name is Ruschebek – a river flowing not far from Ikskuli and Riga and emptying into the Western Dvina. Without attempting to judge the connection between this hydronym and the root 'Rus' (although the interchangeability of Rus/Rusch in geographical names does occur), we note an interesting coincidence: the same name is found in the 'Varangian Pomor' region between Lübeck and Rerik-Stargard.

N.N. Kharuzin believed that certain geographical names also point to the presence of Slavs in Courland. In the 1950s, D.K. Zelenin, having carefully examined historical, linguistic and toponymic data, argued that the Wends of the 'Chronicle of Livonia' were a branch of the Western Slavs who inhabited the Venta River basin. The latter, in his view, derived its name from this ethnonym. Place-names derived from the root 'vene', recorded within Latvia, point to a wider settlement of Slavs in ancient times. The researcher suggested that there are traces of Western Slavic influence in the Latvian language. During the same period, M.V. Bitov identified, in the anthropological makeup of the modern population of western Latvia—including those living in the Venta basin near Ventspils—a set of characteristics indicating that a component with a Mediterranean admixture had contributed to the origins of these inhabitants. A comparison of the Mediterranean elements present in the anthropological structure of the population of Kurzeme with similar characteristics of the Slavic population of 10th–12th-century Mecklenburg and the Polish Pomerania reveals a significant similarity between them. This became a significant argument in favour of the early settlement of Slavs in the Venta basin and the Slavic origin of the historical Wends. This anthropological observation was used by a number of researchers to support the Slavic attribution of the Livonian Wends.

In all three parts of Latvia where sources or place names have preserved the memory of the Wends – in Northern Kurzeme, on the lower Daugava near Daugmale, and on the Gauja in the Venda and Turida area – burial in burial mounds is widespread. The deceased were cremated on the spot, and the ashes were then covered with sand and earth to form a burial mound. Neither the Balts nor

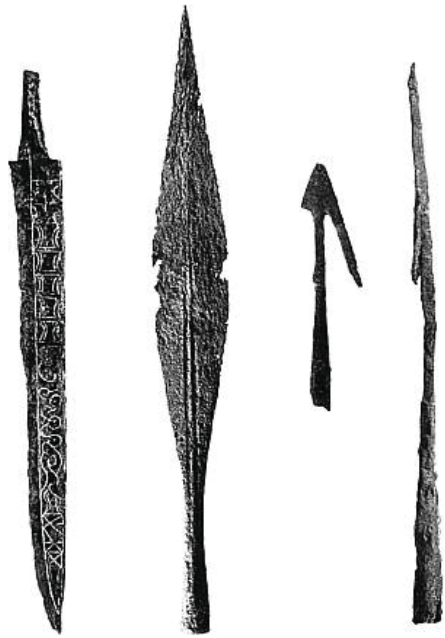
the Baltic Finns-Livonians have such a custom; their burials consist of ground graves.

Igor Gusev, a Russian historian from Latvia, draws particular attention to the fact that the flag described in the chronicles of the Teutonic Order, from which the current flag of the Republic of Latvia is modelled, is in fact of Wendish origin: Red with a white stripe according to Wendish custom ('mit einer banier rot gevar, daz, was mit wize, durch gesniten hute nach wendischen siten'). The text notes that Wenden – the castle from which this flag is known – is situated in the land of the Latvians ("Wenden is a castle known as such, from which the banner was known, and it is situated in the land of the Latvians"). The author goes on to describe how the women there ride horses just like the men, and concludes by asserting that the flag he saw, in accordance with Wendish custom, is indeed the flag of the Latvians.

During excavations in Riga, small horn 'pins' with four heads were unearthed. 'Sventovit' again! But where else could they have come from, if not from the Wends who lived in this place?

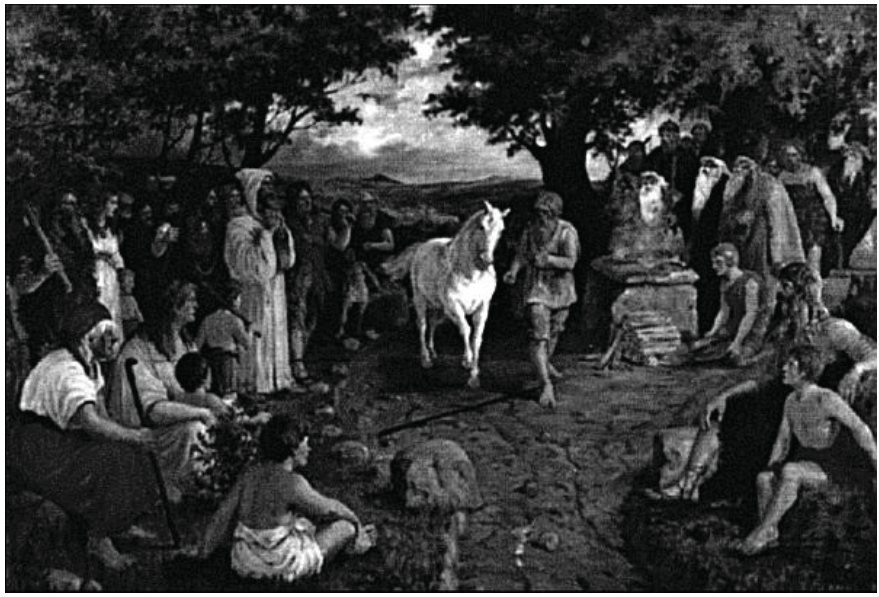
And yet another detail linking the south-east of the Baltic with the Varangian Pomor region.

*The horned 'Sventovit' from the excavations in Riga*



*Spearheads*

When, according to the same ‘Latvian Chronicles’, the Livonians sought to kill a certain Theodoric, an assistant to Bishop Mainard, regarding him as an evil sorcerer, the following occurred: ‘The people gathered and decided to consult the will of the gods regarding the sacrifice through divination. They placed a spear on the ground; a horse stepped over it and, by the will of God, placed its front hoof first—the hoof revered as the hoof of life; a brother recited prayers with his lips and blessed with his hands. The sorcerer said that the Christian god was sitting on the horse’s back, guiding the horse’s hoof, and that they must therefore wipe the horse’s back to shake the god off. When this was done, and the horse once again, just as before, stepped first with the ‘foot of life’, Brother Theodorich’s life was spared.”



*'The Horse of Destiny', Arturs Baumanis, 1887*

The ritual, which turned out so well for the German, bears a striking resemblance to those performed in Arkona and Radigost, Szczecin and Welgast. It is unlikely that it could have reached the Livonians by any other means than through the Wendish colonists.

Going back a little further, we find, at the mouth of the Neman, a cluster of place-names which, it seems to me, are most directly linked to the Varangian Rus'.

Adam of Bremen mentioned 'Rus', bordering the Semigallians and Prussians. Three hundred years later, Peter of Duisburg mentioned a certain 'Rus' in the lower reaches of the Neman, near Memel. On old maps, the entire lower course of the Neman has been referred to as 'Russa' or 'Russe' since the 17th century, and a town of the same name is marked there. On German maps, this name for the Neman appears until the 20th century.

And in that same lower course of the Neman, from 1277 onwards, the chronicles of the Crusaders mention certain 'Skalvi', that is, 'Sklavi', Slavs. Until recently, the Samogitians referred to this region as Shlavonia ('sk' is pronounced as 'sh' in Samogitian dialects).

And finally, the easternmost colony of Varangian Rus'.

Ladoga. Izborsk. Beloozero.

The lands from which our Rus' began.

I have tried, as far as possible, not to dwell in this book on the two-hundred-year-old dispute between proponents of the Norman theory and proponents of the Slavic theory (is it not time to set aside the derogatory term 'anti-Normanist'? It is quite an honour, you know, to define oneself in relation to these gentlemen). I have mentioned them enough in my previous books.

Here too, where I am forced to touch upon this subject whether I like it or not, I shall endeavour to keep the discussion of theories to a minimum, confining myself strictly to facts and source data, and refraining from getting carried away with criticism.

Firstly, in the Novgorod region, in the vicinity of the Ferapontov Monastery, villages built in the Wendish style – in a 'circular' pattern – have survived. Or in a horseshoe shape.

The stone fortresses of Ladoga and the neighbouring Lyubsh were built in the 7th–8th centuries according to Wendish architectural principles. Similarly, the Novgorod citadel of 1116 is very similar in rampart construction to the fortifications of the Baltic Slavs, but bears no

resembles the Dnieper fortresses.

Urban development, in turn, had little in common with the Scandinavian style.

To begin with, in the vast majority of cases it was log-built. And log houses, rather than post-and-beam or semi-dugout structures, only began to be erected in Sweden in the 10th–11th centuries, under influence from the very same East.

*The Novgorod citadel. Founded by Wendish craftsmen*

On Varyazhskaya Street in Ladoga, as G.S. Lebedev, there stood a ‘large building’ of ‘public and religious purpose, destroyed at the end of the 10th century and resembling, in some structural features, a West Slavic church of the same period in Gross-Raden on the Varnov River (southern Baltic coast)’.

In other words, one of our leading Normanists wrote in black and white that *Varyazhskaya* Street there was *a West Slavic church.*

And then there are the bread ovens that the inhabitants of Ladoga, the Rurik settlement and Novgorod built in their courtyards, which are identical to those used for baking bread on the southern shores of the Baltic Sea.

Ah yes, there are longhouses in Ladoga. However, the head of the Ladoga Archaeological Expedition, A.N. Kirpichnikov—who is **not** known for ‘anti-Normanism’—writes: ‘Neither in Finland, **nor in Sweden**, nor in the Kama region, for example, **have** houses similar to those in Ladoga **yet been discovered**... In the early Middle Ages, longhouses... were *not exclusively Finnish or Germanic*, but were widespread across a vast territory from the Kama region in the east to the Rhine in the west.”

And that is true; as for the fact that longhouses were not unknown to the Wends, we have seen this in the example of ‘Viking camps’.

In the lower, most ancient layers of Ladoga, Novgorod, Pskov and so on, Feldberg and Tornava pottery has been found. Pottery in general can be considered the most reliable indicator of ethnic character. Men may well spy on one another’s weapons, and women on one another’s jewellery, as much as they like. And these are the most sought-after goods – both of them. They are also the most coveted spoils. But you cannot take pots to sell beyond the neighbouring town – they are fragile and cheap. Nor can you haul them back from a raid – your own people would laugh at you.

There is also the Rurik settlement; it is believed that it was from here that the Lord of Veliky Novgorod himself began. And not just Novgorod – Rus’. It was here that Rurik came from across the sea – ‘to rule and govern by right’, to bring ‘order’ to ‘a great and bountiful land’.

The pottery there…

Have you guessed it yet, reader?

From the southern Baltic.

All of it.

Well, even if you can buy a pot, you cannot buy or trade for that shard you carry on your shoulders; you can only inherit it. And among the Ilmen Slavs, who founded Ladoga, Novgorod and Beloozero, these very shards are not particularly common – they are rather short, but narrow-faced. All the surrounding tribes – the Votyaks, Korels and Izhorians – have broad faces and, judging by the skulls in the burials, the further back in time you go, the more pronounced these features become. Moreover, their faces are somewhat flat, and again, the earlier skulls are flatter, closer to the Mongoloid Lapps, whereas those of the Slovenes are 'distinctly Caucasoid' from the very beginning. The Scandinavians, again, are narrow-faced – but long-headed. And the closest resemblance to the skulls of the Novgorodians and Ladogans, as the late archaeologist V.V. Sedov had already established, is found in the burial grounds of medieval Mecklenburg. On the lands of the Obodrites-Rerics.

The linguistic similarities between the people of Novgorod – and the inhabitants of the Pomor region (in this instance, not the Varangian Pomor region but the White Sea Pomor region) and Western Siberia, which were settled by migrants from Novgorod, as well as the remnants of the Wendish-Slavic world – were first identified by such an eminent scholar as A.A. Shakhmatov. He pointed to the 'tsokaniye' – the pronunciation of 'ts' instead of 'ch' in northern Russian dialects. N.M. Petrovsky continued this work, noting in 1922 a number of West Slavic features that appear in the Novgorod chronicles and charters. These include the endings '-yata' and '-khno' (Petryata, Gyuryata, Smechno, Prokhno, Zhirokhno). They also include the spellings 'storovy' instead of 'zdravy', 'drevyany' instead of 'drevylyany', 'podvegli' instead of 'podvely', and 'nelza'. The baton was then taken up by the eminent linguist and philologist D.K. Zelenin. He noted that the word 'smerd' was known outside Rus' only to the Baltic Slavs, and that the North Russian word 'neved' (a fishing net) was recorded in 1275 amongst the inhabitants of the Varangian Pomor region, and that the simplest, most commonplace word 'sobaka' is known amongst the Slavs only to the Russians and the descendants of the Pomors, the Kashubians.

But.

The real bombshell came in the second half of the 20th century, when an archaeologist's spade unearthed scraps of birch bark bearing uneven letters from the damp soil of Novgorod. Hundreds have since been found in Novgorod, Staraya Russa, Pskov, Smolensk, Ryazan and Moscow. But the 'champion' to this day remains His Majesty the Grand Prince of Novgorod. Based on the letters found there, the dialect was reconstructed—the one to which the Novgorod chroniclers, clerks and town council officials deviated from the 'correct', 'literary' language, with an eye to Church Slavonic and Old Russian. Academician V.L.Yanin recently emphasised that 'the search for parallels to the characteristics of the ancient Novgorod dialect has led to the realisation that the impetus for the migration of the bulk of the Slavs to the lands of the Russian North-West originated from the southern coast of the Baltic, from where the Slavs had been displaced by German expansion[40]. These observations, the scholar notes, 'coincided with the conclusions reached by various researchers based on material from burial mounds, anthropology, the history of ancient Russian monetary and weight systems, etc.'.

A.A. Zaliznyak, a researcher of Novgorod charters, writes: 'Identifying the extent of the differences in the Old Novgorod dialect naturally led researchers to seek analogues for these dialectal features in other Slavic languages. The result of such a search was the conclusion that the original area of Slavic settlement in the Pskov and Novgorod regions was situated within the territory of the Slavic southern Baltic. It is in the languages of the Slavs who lived here, primarily the Lechitic (Old Polish) languages, that a number of parallels to the Old Novgorod dialect have been found. This conclusion coincided with the major observations on the antiquities of burial mounds and settlements made by the late Academician Valentin Vasilyevich Sedov, an outstanding researcher of ancient Slavic culture."

In addition to linguistic features, toponymy from the south also migrated to the Novgorod lands

40 It is simply impossible to agree with this interpretation of the reasons for the migration. The migration began in the 5th–6th centuries, when the main direction of 'Germanic' expansion was towards the ruins of the Roman Empire, whilst Ladoga was founded in the 7th–8th centuries, when the Wends posed more of a problem for the Germans and Danes than the other way round.

coasts of the Varangian Sea. For instance, the famous Lake Ilmen shares its name with the Ilmenau River and Lake Ilmen in Mecklenburg, whilst Lake Seliger—which has gained a notorious reputation in recent years—has a namesake on Rügen.

Much more could be mentioned, right down to, as Yanin pointed out, the weight system. One could, for example, point to 'votive offerings' – a unique Novgorod custom of bringing to church images of diseased body parts, an entire human figure, or an animal. It has been preserved among the Pomors – descendants of the Novgorodians – and clearly has a Western origin, as do the carved icon-statues of Nicholas of Mozhaisk and Paraskeva of Pyatnitsa, which trace back to the carved idols of Arkona, Radigosch and Schetini. Or, for instance, the custom preserved among the Novgorod colonists of keeping… arrows in churches, carrying them in processions (recall the sacred spears of Volyn-Vineta and Velgast).

And what do the chronicles say?

The chronicles state that 'the people of Novgorod are of Varangian descent to this day' and mention that the Varangians settled from the sea of the same name eastwards 'as far as the border of Simov' – that is, as far as Volga Bulgaria. In other words, they directly identify the people of Novgorod with the Varangians. On the other side of that sea, the Varangians 'reside' amongst the Chuds, Prussians and Lyakhs, as far as the 'Agnian' (whom absolutely **all** historians identify as the continental Angles, the ancestors of the inhabitants of the present-day municipality of Angeln in Schleswig) and the Romance 'Volochs'.

Moreover, ***all*** the major Russian chronicles state this.

And the Novgorod chronicle – who, if not the Novgorodians, would know? – specifies 'the Varangians, men of the Slavs'. The Ipatiev Chronicle writes of a 13th-century Polish princess: 'for she was of the line of the Serbian princes
of Serbia, from Kashubia, ***from the Varangian coast beyond the Old City*** beyond the Khodan River'."

The Persian Shams al-Din Dimashqi, a decidedly impartial figure on the Varangian question, asserts: 'There is a large bay here, which is called the Sea **of the Varangians** . And **the Varangians** are a people whose language is incomprehensible (to an Arab)... ***They are Slavs of the Slavs***
".

When, in the 11th century, the Byzantine 'Varangians'[41] and the Orthodox 'Russians' defeated the Normans, an Italian chronicle states that the Normans were defeated by the Russians and… 'Vandals'. And in medieval Europe, it was precisely the Baltic Slavs who were persistently referred to as 'Vandals' – take Adam of Bremen, for instance.

41 Incidentally, Veselovsky also noted that all Byzantine documents refer to the Varangians
'Varangians' rather than 'Varingians'. Yet they were perfectly familiar with the suffix '-ing' and pronounced it correctly – in some documents, 'Kulpingi' and 'Inglingi' are mentioned alongside the 'Varangians'. In other words, the Byzantines, for whom the Varangians guarded the imperial palace, heard this word (from whom? Most likely from the Varangians themselves) with a ***Slavic*** pronunciation, rather than a Germanic one. The Varangians called themselves *Varangians*, not 'Verings'.

*Pomeranian votive images*

That is to say.

Archaeology, linguistics, ethnography and anthropology unanimously assert that the people of Novgorod descended from the Baltic Slavs.

The chronicle states that the people of Novgorod descended from the Varangians.

The chronicle places the Varangian Pomor region at the 'Old City beyond the Khodan'. The Persians refer to the Varangians as Slavs.

Italian chronicles classify the Varangians as Baltic Slavs.

And set against this chorus of opinions stands a single line from a single chronicle – the Kiev Chronicle – in which the Varangians are said to include Scandinavian tribes (let us not even consider the puns of the three German Zadornovs of the 18th century).

Imagine, by way of comparison, that some, say, French scholar, on the basis that the Western Franks in their chronicles sometimes include among the 'Normans' the Baltic Slavs, were to identify *all* Normans with the Wends and set about proving that Normandy was a Slavic state on French soil, and that both Hrolf the Walker and his descendants, William the Conqueror and Roger of Sicily, were in fact Slavs…

For some reason, it seems to me that some kind gentlemen in white, of imposing build and with kind eyes, would turn up at the professor's door in a white car with red trim within 24 hours of such conclusions being made public.

And here, for some reason, this is considered science. Truly, 'Russia cannot be understood by reason'…

I shan't even remind you, dear reader, that after the Battle of Bravall, neither the Swedes nor the Danes had any time to spare for colonising foreign lands – they had their hands full just trying to defend their own against

raids by the Curonians, the Loparians (!!!) and the Wends.

But take, for instance, the story of how the people of Novgorod first refused to pay tribute to the Varangians and drove them away, only to later call upon a Varangian prince – is it not obvious that all this can only make sense as a conflict between a colony and its parent metropolis? And that, viewed from any other angle, this story turns into pure surrealism and absurdity?

However, I promised not to get carried away.

At the time of our story – the turn of the 8th and 9th centuries – Ladoga (Novgorod did not yet exist, nor did the Rurik settlement that would mark its beginnings; there was only a settlement in the area of the future Nerevsky End, featuring the same Feldberg pottery and cobbled streets with wooden planks and cobblestones) with all its outlying settlements and 'suburbs'[42] was merely a colony of one of the Varangian peoples, who levied tribute from it. Granted, 'great and abundant', but still a colony, the most remote and sparsely populated.

If, back then, someone had told a portly merchant from Szczecin, or the wealthiest of Volhynia-Vineta, or a warrior from Vagria or Retra, that this very distant overseas outpost was the sole hope of Varangian Rus', its people, its language, its Faith…

I don't even know if they would have laughed at such a poor joke.

Everything was fine, everything was simply splendid. The churches shone with bright colours, the idols with gold and purple; all the neighbours feared the Varangian war bands, the Varangian Sea was filled with their ships, merchants were packing fortunes into their chests, free peasants and townspeople knew nothing of hunger, and in every courtyard there was a table laid for a guest, whilst wives wore fortunes in silver and gold around their necks.

And only the immortal, many-headed Gods knew that at sunset, beyond the lands of the Frisians, Saxons and Thuringians, a storm was gathering, destined to sweep Slavic Atlantis from the face of the earth. Only they understood that midday had passed and the Sun of Varangian Rus was falling inexorably into a blood-red sunset.

## Chapter V
## SUNSET IN BLOOD: THE FALL OF SLAVIC ATLANTIS

*In the distorted mirror of Slavophilism. The first encounter with the Franks. Charlemagne. Louis and the Vikings. Henry the Bird Catcher and his descendants. How did the giants become fierce Chams?*

*The final battles. The sinking of the Slavic Atlantis.*

*In Rome, the ancient, eternal*
*Rome, Where the Holy Father*
*dwells, An army of knights was*
*summoned*
*For a campaign to the Baltic.*
*The Baltic was consecrated to*
*the Virgin Mary By the Holy*
*Father; to bloodthirsty men*
*and murderers He granted*
*absolution*
*For all their sins: so that they might*
*convert*
*The unfortunate people of the Baltic,*
*Perishing in paganism.*
*He gave them his blessing*
*for new murders...'* **A.I.**
**Pumpur**

Unfortunately, the subject we shall be discussing in this chapter, dear reader, has been somewhat marred by the approach of its earliest researchers. As I mentioned in the first chapter,

42 were not called 'suburbs' or 'suburban' at the time, but rather 'junior', subordinate towns.

were studied by the Slavophiles, and this left the same mark on both their works and everything that followed – the root of the Baltic Slavs' woes lay in the hostile Germans. It was they, those wretches, who introduced the godless 'spirit of tribal exclusivity' and 'national enmity' into the holy cause of bringing the 'true faith' to the Wendish East.

It is quite surprising to read about this in the very same work by Alexander Fomich Hilferding. No wonder Dmitry Nikolayevich Egorov severely criticised both Hilferding and the Slavophiles as a whole for this bias. And how could one not criticise them! You read Hilferding's work and see clearly that the 'national enmity' between Slavs and Germans exists only in the author's own constructs regarding times about which nothing is really known – all these 'Germanic hordes' ruling over the Slavs, their expulsion by the harsh but righteous Attila, and so on. Or in times when the Christian Church – not yet divided, I might add, into Catholic and Orthodox – places a cross in the hand of a newly converted German and incites him against the godless 'pagans'. This action, incidentally, apart from the obvious – the expansion of the Church's influence and the acquisition of new souls and new earthly riches for it – also has a second meaning. It is called 'binding with blood' and has been practised by bands of murderers since time immemorial. It matters little that in this instance there was (apparently) no court of law before which the bandits bound one another with blood. After all, a person judges themselves. And it is incredibly difficult to admit that the cause for which not even you – but your loved one – killed, or was even killed, was in the wrong. 'We were at war with them!' – so what questions could there possibly be…

However, we risk veering into psychology. Let's return to history.

So, in the interval between these two moments, for some reason we see no manifestations of 'age-old national enmity' or 'exceptionalism'. Where, pray tell, is this 'exclusivity' among the Frisians and Saxons, when they joined forces with the Velets to form a sort of empire, recognising a ***Velet*** city as its capital? In what way did the enmity between the Slavs and the Germans manifest itself at Bravalla, where both sides fought side by side – a Rus' man alongside a Norwegian and a Swede, a Wend alongside a Dane and a Jutlandic, when in one army a Slavic woman carried the banner of the Danish king, and the other was led by the son of a Slavic woman??

I assure you, reader, we shall not encounter her again. Thitmar of Merseburg mentions in passing: 'In 954, Wilhelm was appointed Archbishop of Magdeburg; though born of a captive and a Slavic woman, he was ***of noble birth***, and the son of King Otto.' There you have it. The German acknowledges the captive Slavic woman as noble. Yet when he wishes to disparage a Slav, he for some reason resorts to Gospel-like expressions:

> '...The princes of the Vinuli were Mstivoi and Mechidrag, under whose leadership a rebellion broke out. As is said and as is known from the tales of ancient peoples, Mstivoi asked for the niece of Duke Bernard as his wife, and the duke promised her to him. Now this prince of the Vinuli, wishing to fulfil the promise, [set off] with the duke for Italy, accompanied by a thousand horsemen, almost all of whom were killed there. When, upon returning from the campaign, he asked for the maiden promised to him, Margrave Theodoric revoked this decision, shouting loudly ***that the Duke's relative should not be given to a dog***. Hearing this, Mstivoi withdrew in indignation. When, however, the Duke, having changed his mind, sent envoys after him to conclude the desired marriage, he is said to have given this reply: "The noble niece of the great sovereign ought to be united with the most worthy husband, and not given to a dog. Great mercy has been shown to us for our service, so that we are now regarded as dogs rather than men. But if a dog becomes strong, then the bites it inflicts will also be strong." Where, then, does this comparison come from? From the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 15, verse 26: 'He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."' The meaning, according to the context of the phrase, is that one must not give to pagans what one can give to a fellow believer. The comparison of pagans (in the times the events described – non-Jews) to dogs belongs not to just anyone, but to Jesus himself. Yes, there was enmity. An ancient, unquenchable enmity between the worshippers of 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and James' to those who believed differently. And there was exclusivity – the exclusivity of the 'new Israel', the 'true believers'.

It was not the Germans who brought enmity towards the Slavs into Christianity; on the contrary, ‘meek’ Christianity kept pouring fresh buckets of oil onto the fire of enmity between Slavs and Germans.

In the 8th century, shortly before the Battle of Bravalla, events unfolded on the western borders of the Slavic lands, the significance of which was scarcely understood by anyone at the time. Messengers arrived at the Obodrites-Rerici from some Franks, from their ruler Pepin (it is unlikely that the envoys uttered aloud the unflattering nickname of their short-statured ruler, ‘the Short’). Pepin was at war with his half-brother, Griffon; Griffon had already been defeated and thrown into prison; then, when another of Pepin’s full brothers entered a monastery (at this point the Obodrite leaders probably raised their eyebrows in bewilderment), well, in short, became a hermit, Pepin released his half-brother and even granted him lands. In gratitude, the latter marched with his army to the Saxons and incited them to rebel against Pepin and all the Franks. Could the Slavs and the valiant chieftains of the Obodrites not have helped to deal with this scoundrel and his Saxon accomplices?

Whether it was the hot-blooded nature of the leaders of the Falcon tribe, or a desire to teach the Saxons—their age-old rivals and, more importantly, the allies of their sworn enemies, the Geats—a lesson, I cannot say. The Obodrites entered this war by striking the Saxons from the rear. At the same time, a huge Frankish-Frisian army entered Saxon territory from the west. The Saxons sought peace and agreed to pay a tribute of five hundred cows annually. Griffin fled to the Bavarians.

The Obodrites received their promised share of the tribute and returned home satisfied, though somewhat disappointed – they had never quite managed to fight a proper battle.

No one realised that it was the Great Calamity knocking at the door of Slavic Atlantis. And they themselves opened the door at the knock. None of their rulers realised what a colossus was swelling on the other side of the Saxons’ borders, and that the Saxons were no longer the old enemy and ally of the even more vicious enemies of the giants, but the last bastion of paganism and the Germanic tribal way of life akin to that of the Varangians, standing in the path of the avalanche of the Christian empire[43] .

Nor was the second ‘wake-up call’ in the Varangian Pomor region appreciated. This time, the Frankish Empire appeared in all its glory, launching the war with an invasion of the Saxons’ main sanctuary, Eresburg. The ancient Irminsul pillar, revered by the Saxons, was destroyed. For the first time beyond the Roman limes, Christian preaching revealed bared fangs from a lamb’s mouth. But if Charlemagne had hoped to break the Saxons’ spirit with this, he miscalculated – the sacrilege only enraged them and drew many allies to their side.

A brutal war began. The Saxons would submit to force, then rise up again, retreat, and attack. The uprising was led by a chieftain named Widukind, aided by the Danish Vikings led by ‘Siegfried’—whom some identify as Sigurd Kolts, others as Siward—as well as the Slavs, the giants led by Prince Dragovit[44]and the Sorbs. Frisia was in turmoil, having failed to forget the old gods during a century of Christian rule. Four and a half thousand Saxons were executed – and few kept count of those who fell in battle, save perhaps the maidens of Wotan, who carried the souls of the fallen to the gods and ancestors in His realm. Naturally, the Slavs of Lipyan and the White Land fought alongside the inhabitants of the land that had given them shelter.

Unfortunately, not everyone rose to the occasion. The Obodrites did not march against the enemy of their old rivals – the Veli, the Danes and the Saxons. Admittedly, there is no evidence that they stabbed the defenders of the old faith in the back during that war, but neither did they come to their aid.

After thirteen years of war, the Saxon leaders, Abion and Widukind, unable to bear the devastation of their homeland, surrendered to Charlemagne. Surprisingly, he spared them, though he did force them to be baptised.

Three years later, Charlemagne marched his armies against the Geats.

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43 I know that formally Charlemagne did not take the title of emperor until much later. But one can formally be a republic – and yet pursue imperial policies.

44 This name apparently caused no small amount of trouble for Frankish chroniclers. The correct spelling is rarely found; far more often it is distorted in every possible way – Tragwit, Drago, Dragoid and even, if I may say so, Trachyt.

*Widukind. Engraving by Werner Graul, 1936*

And what is most unpleasant is that, on this occasion, the Obodrites and Rerici were on his side. Here is what Einhard writes about this:

'There is a certain tribe (nation) of Slavs in Germany (Natio quaedam Sclavenorum est in Germania...), living on the shores of the Ocean, which in its own language is called the Welatabi, and in Frankish, the Wilzi. They have always been hostile to the Franks and to their neighbours, who were either subjects or allies of the Franks (vel subiecti vel foederati; or subjects or federates); they usually persecuted them with hatred and harassed and troubled them with war. Deciding that he should no longer tolerate its insolence, the king (Charlemagne) resolved to wage war against it and, having mustered a vast army, crossed the Rhine to Cologne. Then, having passed through Saxony, he reached the Elbe; there, having set up camp on the bank, he built two bridges across the river, one of which he surrounded on both sides with a rampart and fortified, stationing a guard there.

He himself, having crossed the river at the point he had chosen, led his army and, having invaded the land of the Wels, ordered everything to be laid waste by fire and the sword. But that people, though warlike and relying on their numbers, could not withstand the onslaught of the royal army for long; and so, when they first approached the town of Dragawita (civitatem Dragawiti) – for he far surpassed all the chieftains (regulis) of the Wends in both the nobility of his lineage and the authority of his age – – he immediately came out of the city with all his people to meet the king, gave

the hostages they demanded, [and] solemnly promised to remain loyal to the king and the Franks. Following his example, other Slavic nobles and chieftains (Sclavorum primores et reguli) submitted to the king's authority (se regis dicioni sub-diderunt). Then, having subdued that people and taken the hostages he had ordered to be handed over, he returned to the Elbe by the same route by which he had come...'

*The Velet Fortification. Reconstruction*

According to the Metz Annals, Dragovit and his son Lyub invoked some old treaties with 'Charles the Invincible'—that is, presumably Charles Martel, the conqueror's grandfather—but as no other sources mention this, it is difficult to say anything definitive. It seems that Dragovit indicated that he had 'received the kingdom' from Martel – that is, he was recognised by him as 'king' (rex), an independent sovereign, equal in status to Martel himself, and formally even higher – for during his lifetime, the conqueror of the Saracens was merely a mayor of the palace. In other words, diplomatic relations with the Franks had already begun by then.

Having secured the ruler of the giants' submission, the Frankish lord turned his course homewards.

However, as early as 792, it all began anew. The long-suffering land of the Saxons erupted once more. The rebels burned down the churches that had been erected on the sites of ancient sanctuaries and slaughtered the garrisons. The Frisians and local Slavs fought alongside the Saxons. In 794, Charlemagne, together with his son Charles the Younger, set out to quell the rebellion. He was met by his Obodrite allies, led by Prince Witzan (or Witzin, or even Widsid[45] ; in Obodrite genealogies he is called Witslaw). But the Saxons (of the Nordalbing tribe) – whether they had foreseen this or had been warned by someone in the prince's entourage – ambushed Witzan (we shall call him that for now) on the River Elbe, and he was killed.

In 798, Dražko, the son of the slain Witzan, invaded the land of the Nordalbingi alongside Charlemagne. Accompanying him was the Frankish legate Eburius (it is difficult to say whether this is a name or a nickname; in Old Germanic, it means 'boar'). 'He came out to meet them on the field with his entire army,

45 It is a pity that this name did not find its way into our chronicles. That is someone who should have been included among the 'Normans' without a moment's hesitation!

known as Sventana [modern-day Schwentanafeld near Bornhöved in Holstein (Germany)], and... inflicted a great slaughter upon them' – so the Frankish chronicler dispassionately describes the actions of the Obodrite prince in the land of the Nordalbingi. Four thousand Saxon corpses were counted on the battlefield alone; no one knew how many had been hacked to death or shot during the panicked flight.

An interesting detail: in the very earliest chronicles, the name Dražko appears before that of Eburiz. In somewhat later accounts, the legate of the Christian ruler already precedes the pagan. Well, in the very latest ones, Dražko disappears, and it turns out that Eburiz defeated the Nordalbingians all by himself.

*Battle axes of the Varangian Slavs*

In 799, Charlemagne himself was marching alongside Dražko with his sons. Saxony, and Nordalbingia in particular, were swept clean as if by a broom. The rebellious perished, whilst those who submitted were driven in droves into Frankish territory – far from the graves of their ancestors, from their sacred groves, and from the familiar forests where it was so easy to lay ambushes for Frankish chain-mail-clad warriors. But whilst the vacated lands in the rest of Saxony were settled by Franks, Charlemagne generously gifted the entire land of the Nordalbings to Dražko.

The future emperor's generosity was easily explained. The Slavs were to serve as a living, reliable barrier between the rebellious Saxon lands and their allies, the Danes. In 808, now as emperor, Charlemagne issued laws restricting trade between the Franks and the Slavs. Two trading posts were established near the mouth of the Elbe (in the north-eastern corner of present-day Hanover), situated very close to one another, namely in Bardwick and Schezle, and only one along the entire course of the middle Elbe, in Magdeburg, where the Germans were permitted to trade with the Stodor region. I have already mentioned the ban on selling weapons to the Wends; the same applied to armour. I cannot say whom the Frankish emperor feared more – the Obodrite warriors, whom he had seen in action, or the Obodrite armourers. Under this law, anyone transporting armour or weapons across the Labe had all their goods confiscated (whatever they were carrying), with only half going to the treasury, whilst the rest was divided between the investigator who had uncovered the contraband, and the customs officer.

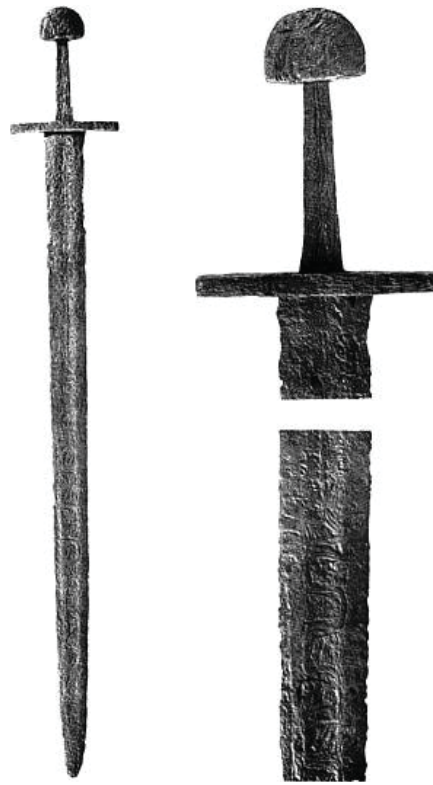
The inspectors, one imagines, were diligent.

And yet the swords still found their way through. Blades bearing the names of famous

Frankish masters—Ulfberht, Ingelred and others—made their way far beyond the Laba. Moreover, of the one hundred and sixty-five known Western European blades with hallmarks, only one has been found in Sweden, whereas ***thirty*** have been found in the Varangian Pomor region, and eleven such swords have been discovered within the borders of Rus'. This speaks volumes about trade links, by the way…

However, far too many were dissatisfied with the Obodrite alliance with the Franks and its fruits – in the form of the lands received by Dražko –[46] . Both within the Obodrite alliance and beyond its borders. The reasons could have been varied – ranging from the blasphemy, for a pagan, of an alliance not merely with a Christian, but with a destroyer of sanctuaries and an insulter of the gods, to entirely worldly considerations.

Godfrey, son of Siegfried, led the discontented (and Siegfried himself, one wonders, where had he gone? Could it be that he had simply remained on the crimson grass of Sventana?). The Velets joined them, and even two Obodrite chieftains turned against their sovereign – the chieftain of the Linians and the chieftain of the Smeldings.



*The Sword*

46 Was it not, in fact, during those very years that the Ilmen Slavs, together with their neighbours, 'drove the Varangians out across the sea and refused to pay them tribute'? Was it not the alliance between the metropolis and Charlemagne that served as the basis for the break? Otherwise, everything in the chronicle seems to have happened rather quickly, all within a single year. Good heavens, even in our turbulent times it took ten years for those who were jumping for joy on 9 August and snarling at the telly, 'Crush the commies!' in '93, to start sobbing nostalgically about the 'great power' that had been 'traded off for a sausage', and to assure everyone that they personally had driven Yeltsin's tanks away from the White House with a red banner. And in the Middle Ages, for the people to call upon those they had driven out to 'rule and reign', a generational shift would have been required, at the very least.

The Danes struck the Obodrite coast from the sea. The Velets stormed in from the land. And the Linians, together with the Smeldings, blocked the exits to the Elbe, preventing them from calling on a mighty ally for help.

Drazko fled. His brother Godleib (Godoslav? Godolub?) was taken prisoner and hanged. It was then that the population of the trading and craft settlement was resettled to Hedeby, which, following this relocation, flourished and became a wealthy trading town instead of an obscure hamlet.

Whilst Witzan selflessly rushed to his ally's aid and perished, the Frankish emperor acted with far greater prudence. When he finally learnt of the devastation of the Obodrite lands, he sent his son there—that very same Charles the Younger—instructing him not to rush headlong beyond the Laba, but to stop on the left bank, wait until everything became clear, and watch to see if the Danes attempted to cross the Laba. Then, and only then, was he to engage them in battle.

However, no one was particularly inclined to wait for Charles the Younger to assess the situation. The Veleti and the Danes, laden with booty, scattered to their homes. The Smeldings and Linians were the last to leave. Charles the Younger, contrary to his father's instructions, decided all the same to punish them for betraying the Franks' ally (to be honest, at this point I'd lost track of who was the traitor and who wasn't… yes, the Smeldings and the Linians had betrayed the prince and defected to his enemies – but then again, this prince himself, with his own hands, had been digging the grave of the entire Varangian Pomor region by collaborating with the Christian Franks). The Frankish army built a bridge across the Laba and marched eastwards. However, it remains to be seen who actually punished whom. The young prince had been quite wrong to disobey his father. He lost many men on the punitive expedition and returned to Germany.

Charlemagne, seeing his ally's ruin and fearing that Godfrey would now be able to visit him unhindered by land, meanwhile began hastily to fortify the Nordalbingian lands—which he himself had ceded to the Obodrites—for defence. On the left bank of the Elbe, opposite the lands of the Linians and Smeldings, lay the Altmark, with the fortress of Hochbocki, situated directly opposite the Smeldings' fortress, Lenzin. On the right bank of the Laba, a fortress was erected above the Slavic town of Gam, complete with a Christian church, and he was preparing to appoint a certain Geridag as bishop there (granting him a fortified monastery in neighbouring Flanders in case of a strategic retreat from the Wends or the Danes). Geridag, however, died on the journey, and the ageing emperor, bogged down in urgent affairs, never got round to sending a new bishop to the fortress.

Meanwhile, Dražko turned up, not in the best of moods. He hastily made peace with Godfrey and even handed over his son Chedrag (or Sidrag) as a hostage. Just as suddenly, he made peace with the Saxons as well. And then, with combined forces, he struck at… the Velets.

He swept through the land of the Velets with fire and sword, returned with the spoils, divided them amongst his warriors, and issued a new call to arms across the Saxon March. A fair number of volunteers arrived, and with them he set out to wage war against the Smeldings and make an example of them to all who did not understand what a prince was and why the Obodrites needed one. It was a lesson to remember; the Smeldings' main city, Konev, was burnt to the ground.

However, that was the end of Dražko's exploits. In that same year, 809, he was killed somewhere in Volhynia, allegedly by mercenaries in the service of the Danish king. But was that really the case? Firstly, it all went about too civilised – no raids, no fires, no commotion… had the Danes really become that civilised? Secondly, a year later, Godfrey himself was killed by a servant, and his son Hemming hastened to make peace with the Frankish emperor.

It gives one pause for thought. Either the great conqueror, in his old age, realised that there are methods in this world more cunning than the direct and heavy Frankish sword, or someone in his entourage had already come to understand this. Where there are empires, there are always intrigues.

The final years of Emperor Charlemagne's life and reign, and the early years of his successor Louis, present nothing pleasing to the Slavic eye. They still regard the emperor as the 'Elder Brother', and even Prince

, is presented to him for ‘approval’. Or did Roman imperial symbolism exert such a mesmerising influence on the minds of the descendants of the Federates?

The Velets, having recovered from the pogrom inflicted upon them by Dražko, meanwhile crossed the Laba and burned down the fortress built against the Linyan lands.

Charles’s reaction was immediate. To begin with, the Smeldings, Betenians and Linians had a hard time of it. Then no fewer than three armies marched against the Velets, who were forced to sue for peace and hand over hostages.

Some time later, the Frankish emperor passed away. It must be said that Charlemagne treated his Slavic adversaries quite differently from his Germanic ones; perhaps that is why he won their respect. In the Slavic lands, he did not destroy idols, did not execute hundreds or thousands of prisoners, and did not take vast numbers captive. Yet he broke the back of the centuries-old enemy and ravager of the Slavs of Central Europe – the Avar Khaganate. It matters little that he did not do this out of kindness or out of great love for the Slavs – he did it, and that was what mattered most to the Slavs at the time. Apparently, as a sign of respect for him, a significant portion of the Slavic people began to call their highest rulers ‘kings’. It is amusing that in Germanic languages –
‘Karl’ – means a commoner, a peasant, a word with a distinct undertone of contempt. The Carolingian mayordomos retained this name in their lineage from the time they were barred from the palaces.

It is characteristic that the head of Oleg’s embassy in Constantinople was called Karl. The name is German – but only a man alien to Germanic traditions and the German language could have placed a man with such a name at the head of a diplomatic mission to a foreign country. By way of comparison: in Norway, which had already been baptised, a confidant of King Olav the Holy decided to name the king’s son—born in his father’s absence—after Charlemagne, or Karl the Great. And yet he preferred to give the child the obscure name Magnus rather than the all-too-familiar Karl.

And I would like to note one further detail. It was Charlemagne who played a decisive role in spreading Christianity beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. But not through the forced baptism of his neighbours, no. It was he who showed many pagan chieftains that it was possible to be a Christian and, at the same time, a great, ruthless, strong and intelligent military leader.

In the first few years after Charlemagne’s death, things looked rather bleak and a sort of squabbling prevailed. Louis the Pious had to settle disputes over succession, first among the Obodrites, where Slavomir, chosen at the assembly, was locked in a struggle with Chedrag Dražković, who had returned from Danish captivity, and then among the Veleti, where the grandsons of Dragovit, the children of Luba—who had perished in the war with the Obodrites— Milogost and Celodrag, and at times between the Obodrites and the Velets.

*Castle. Stanisław Jakubowski*

Slavimir, having received an order to appear in court, took offence, despite the fact that the prince was an elected rather than a hereditary ruler, and instead formed an alliance with the Danes to attack the Franks, which was carried out. Slavimir was immediately captured by loyalists of the Frankish king (or rather, of the former princely house) and handed over to the Franks. Chedrag solemnly ascended his father's throne. And shortly afterwards, Louis learnt that it was now Chedrag who was conspiring with the Danes. In a panic, he released Slavimir from prison to place him on the throne in place of the treacherous Chedrag, but Slavimir died on the way home.

In the case of the Velets, the son of the great emperor displayed great diplomatic skill. Prince Lyub, who had died no later than 825, had two sons; the veche first nominated Milogost, but then, having considered such a prince, decided to hold a fresh vote, to remove the prince from his grandfather's throne and to seat his younger brother in his place. The Pious One did not express his opinion until he was convinced that the will of the Velech people was indeed in favour of the younger son. Yet he also sent the elder son away with rich gifts, so that he would not take offence.

Incidentally, in all this commotion, few remembered that Dražko, Chedrag's father, had a brother, and that he had children—or rather, three sons: Rurik, Sivar and Truvar. Yes, yes, yes. Those very ones.

'The Obotrites were ruled by a king named Godlav, the father of three young men, all equally strong, brave and thirsty for glory. The first was called Rurik, the second Sivar, and the third Truvar. The three brothers, finding no suitable opportunity to test their bravery in their father's peaceful kingdom, decided to set out in search of battles and adventures in other lands... They headed east and became famous in the lands through which they passed. Wherever the brothers encountered the oppressed, they came to their aid; wherever

war between two rulers, the brothers sought to understand which of them was in the right, and took his side. After many noble deeds and terrible battles, the brothers, who were admired and blessed, arrived in Russia. The people of this land suffered under the yoke of a long tyranny, against which they dared not rise up. The three brothers, moved by their misfortune, roused the dormant courage within them, gathered an army, led it, and overthrew the oppressors' rule. Having restored peace and order to the land, the brothers decided to return to their aged father, but the grateful people begged them not to leave and to take the place of the former kings. Then Rurik received Novgorod, Sivar – Pleskov, and Truvar – Beloozero." Xavier Marmier, Letters from the North (Les lettres sur le nord), 'Voeters', Brussels, 1841).

However, let us not get ahead of ourselves. That event is still some time away, and for now… for now we are in the midst of the Viking Age. Including that of the Slavs.

In 837, something hitherto unheard of occurred. The Veleti and the Obodrites joined forces and rose up together against the East Frankish – or German, if you will – kingdom. Louis sent troops against the pagans. The result was unexpected – an embassy arrived from… the King of Denmark, demanding that the Slavs be left in peace and recognised as a zone of Danish interest. Oh, and Frisia too, please – our people have already plundered everything there anyway, so what use is it to you now? Stunned by the audacity of the northern pagans, the king naturally refused the embassy's demands. The royal commanders arrived with captives, whom they referred to as hostages, and assurances that the pagans' rebellion had been quelled. What these good people felt when, the following year, the very same Wends, Velts and Obodrites, along with the Danish Vikings who had joined in the general merrymaking, began to rampage along the Elbe, burning German villages – history is silent on this. Nor did the chroniclers record what King Louis said to his soldiers on this matter.

Louis now sent an entire army of Thuringians, Saxons and Austrasians to meet these uninvited guests, but for some reason his court chroniclers are reluctant to recount how this expedition ended.

Unfortunately, the Wends missed a brilliant opportunity by failing to support the Stellingi's uprising in 840 – the 'People of the Old Law' – which was perhaps the last significant uprising by the Saxon pagans. A great pity. On the other hand, in 841, Hamburg was captured by a band of sea raiders, whom Western Frankish chroniclers, in their usual manner, refer to as Normans. The attackers slaughtered many of the townspeople, plundered for two days, and on the third day set the city alight and departed. The priests and the bishop barely managed to carry the holy relics out of the city cathedral; the bishop even forgot his cloak.

Local legend, however, has it that the leader of the 'Normans' was called… Boruta. And his army consisted of Slavs living not far from the border.

In 844, when the Stellings had been crushed, Louis attacked the Obodrites. Their senior prince, with the strikingly familiar name of Gostomysl, was killed.

In 845, during Louis's next retaliatory expedition beyond the Labe, mention is made of 'their king' (i.e. of the Wends), Rerik. A recurring pattern, however. At the same time, the Wends once again plundered Hamburg.

In 858, the king himself led an army into battle against the Veleti and the Obodrites.

After 862, Tabomysl is referred to as the 'king' of the Obodrites. But where is Rerik? Rerik is busy, and very far away, on the other side of the Varangian Sea.

'In 880,' writes A.F. Gilferding, 'the Normans swept into Germany with particular ferocity and struck at it in two places: on the Scheldt and on the Elbe. On the Scheldt, in the Netherlands, they were repelled; but in Saxon territory (probably in Nordalbingen), the warriors of the north won one of their most glorious victories (2 February). The Saxons' defeat was total; the memory of it lived on for several centuries. The Normans' weapons and the river (undoubtedly the Elbe), which had unexpectedly burst its banks, destroyed the entire Saxon army: here perished the Saxon Duke Brun, uncle of the later famous King Henry the Fowler; along with him perished 11 counts of the Saxon lands with their regiments and 18 royal retainers together with their retinues; finally, two bishops, Theotrich of Minden and Marquard of Hildesheim, who, in accordance with the custom prevailing in the West at that time

, fought in the ranks of the army. The Slavs also took part in this great victory – undoubtedly the Bodrichi and Lutichi, who were closest to the Saxons and Danes. The chronicler states that Bishop Markwart was killed by the Slavs; but the Normans played the leading role in the battle: the Slavs apparently constituted only an auxiliary force, which the Normans had summoned to march against the Germans. That is why most chroniclers did not even mention their participation in this war."

In 902, the Baltic Slavs ravaged Saxony. In 916, the

Obodrites laid waste to Noralbingia.

The voice of the German chronicles is barely heard at this time. Christian civilisation is undergoing a severe crisis. The Hungarians are sweeping in from the south-east; their warhorses carry their riders all the way to the Atlantic, piercing straight through the German principalities and baronies. From the north, the Normans and, at times, the Slavs are advancing up the rivers. Finally, the Slavs themselves are attacking from the east. In 880, the king complained that even the Saxons had begun to turn back to the old gods.

At this time, the civilisation of Slavic Atlantis is experiencing a second rise. But this

is already an 'Indian summer'. Only autumn lies ahead.

In 919, Henry the Fowler came to power in the land of the East Franks – and this was truly the beginning of the end. It was he who would turn the land of the East Franks into Germany, and his son into the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. And it was this very state that swallowed up Slavic Atlantis like an ocean.

Hilferding reproaches the Varangian Slavs: why, during the period granted to them by history, did they do nothing to prevent the realisation of Charlemagne's plans?

The reproach is unjust. These plans, as Alexander Fomich depicts them, existed only in his mind; they could not be deduced from Charlemagne's actions.

Charlemagne did not seek to destroy Slavic pagan temples. He did not install margraves in Slavic lands, merely fortifying the borders. He united the Germanic peoples and revived the Roman Empire for them – these were his overarching goals. He gave very little thought to advancing eastwards, to subjugating other tribes or imposing the 'true' faith upon them (though, like any Christian, he naturally welcomed the baptism of pagans). Of what 'advancement' and

'imposition' could one speak of, when rebellions flared up time and again within his own empire right up until his death? Compared to the Frankish realm of the early Carolingians, Rus' in the time of Igor or Oleg the Prophet was a model of stability. There, most of the tribal 'principalities' rebelled against Kyiv no more than once in the lifetime of a single Grand Prince. And how many times did Charlemagne himself have to wage war against the Saxons? Three? He fought just as many times against Aquitaine. And in other parts of the kingdom, the situation was, for the most part, no better.

It is difficult to discern such villainous plans in relation to Louis either – by the end of his life, his position had become purely defensive.

The young and energetic Saxon dynasty is quite another matter. Moreover, whilst for Charlemagne the Slavic frontier was merely one of the many facets of his colossal empire, for the Saxon dynasty, founded by Henry the Bird-Catcher, this was, perhaps, the main theatre of operations.

Apart from the new dynasty and the new state – the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation – two further powers had emerged in the Varangian lands, namely the Roman Church, which, in the century or so that had passed since the days of Pepin and Charlemagne, since the

the 'discovery' of the forged 'Donation of Constantine', had become considerably more ambitious. Secondly… oh, what a slippery subject this is. Oh well, you can't take the words out of the song. I am talking about the Jewish slave-traders, the Rachdonites[47], who appeared at the eastern borders of the then

47 To avoid the ritual accusations of 'anti-Semitism', here is a brief summary of expert opinions:

*Metz, A.* The Muslim Renaissance. Moscow: Nauka, 1966. pp. 366–367: 'The main commodity supplied by Europe – slaves – was entirely in the hands of the Jews.' *Niederle, L.* Slavic Antiquities. Moscow: Aleteya, 2000. p. 390:

'The entire trade in Slavic slaves and the associated castration were in the hands of the Jews.' *Mishin, D.E.* The Sakaliba (Slavs) in the Islamic World in the Early Middle Ages. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2002. p. 141:

Germany in the 10th century – although some managed to do so slightly earlier. The names of those who, as early as the 9th century, received a monopoly on the slave trade from King Louis have been preserved: the rabbis Donat and Samuel, David and Joseph of Lyon, and Abraham of Zaragoza.

The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation needed the lands of Varangian Rus'.

The Church was eager to destroy the 'seats of idolatry' (and, of course, did not turn down the lands either).

And for the slave traders, war with the pagans promised unprecedented wealth.

It was Henry I the Fowler who, having captured the city of the Slavic Glomachians, Gane, slaughtered all the adults and carried off the children and adolescents into slavery. For him, his vassals, and their descendants, such treatment of 'pagan heathens' became the norm.

Between 927 and 929, all the peoples between the Labe and the Oder were conquered and forced to pay tribute.

In the year of Henry the Bird-Catcher's death, the giant Ratarians attempted to revolt.

But let us return, however, to our sombre tale. Otto, Henry's son, did not lead the campaign against the Ratarians himself, but sent Hermann Billung against them. For his suppression of the rebels, Hermann was rewarded with the title of Margrave of the Lower Elbe, in the region of the Ratarians, the Obodrites and the Danes. The following day, Gero was sent to the Middle Elbe to counter the Velets.

Ah… and speaking of the Veleti. It is precisely at this historical moment that something strange occurs. The name and form of government change abruptly. The former Veleti (Viltini, Viltsi, Veletabi, etc.) become the Lutici. Until the 10th century, nobody knew this name. After the 10th century, the former name disappears very quickly.

And at the same time, the form of government changes just as abruptly.

We remember, reader, that the Velets had princes. The legendary Viltin and his descendants, and the very real Dragovit, Lyub, Milogost, and Celodrag. But the Lutichs have no princes. Not a single one. They decide everything at a council, even during wartime.

Very strange changes indeed! Could it be that a revolution has taken place within the tribe?

And around the same time – perhaps a little earlier – an entire confederation of tribes disappears from the region between the Dnieper and Dniester rivers. It is last mentioned in the 940s, during the reign of Igor the Old. I am talking about the Ulichi – or, as they are called in some chronicles, the 'Lutichi'. Incidentally, at the beginning of our historical era, this was precisely the reading considered canonical – just take a look at Karamzin, for example. And by the way – this tribal confederation is not among those that had their 'own principality'.

Is this a mere coincidence? Who knows – perhaps archaeologists will shed some light on the matter.

But let us return to Margrave Hero. In 938, when the threat of an uprising arose, he invited the tribe's finest and most distinguished men to his court, plied them with wine laced with a sleeping potion – and cold-bloodedly slaughtered them. Such treachery forced almost the whole of Varangian Rus' to take up arms. In 939, the uprising reached the region of the Obodrites. The rebels slaughtered Count Hoiko's Saxon army; the count himself did not survive. Emperor Otto was forced to personally take command of the troops.

But the Germans did not rely solely on the sword – these were no longer the brutal yet simple-hearted Saxons of Widukind. Take, for example, the following story: the Germans helped Tugomir, a young prince from the Gavolyan tribe who had grown up in captivity, to 'escape' from them. His hometown, Branibor, welcomed the young hero with open arms. Soon afterwards, Tugomir killed his nephew—his brother's son and the tribe's last prince—and opened the gates to the conquerors.

Alongside this betrayal, the new faith, brought on the spears of the invaders, became a tool for subjugating the eastern pagans. Churches began to be built in the Slavic regions, and in 948 the bishoprics of Hafelberg and Brandenburg were established to coordinate missionary activities, both of which were subordinate to the Archbishopric of Mainz. In the mid-10th century, Gero and Billung undertook veritable crusades

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'slave trade… was conducted predominantly by Jewish merchants, the Rahdanites'.

campaigns, forcibly compelling the Baltic Slavs to adopt the new faith.

954: Hero subjugated the Ukrs. ‘In that year, Hero won a glorious victory over the Slavs… A vast amount of booty was taken, and great jubilation arose in Saxony,’ writes Widukind of Corvey.

In 955, the Obodrite princes, Nacon and Stoignev, together with the Saxon pagan Wichman, undertook a grand campaign to the West. Margrave Hermann Billung attempted to stop them, but was repelled and fled. The Obodrites captured a small town with the strange name of Kokarescemi, slaughtering the garrison and taking the wives and children into slavery.

On 16 October 955, a battle took place on Obodrite territory by the River Raksy (Reknitz), ending in a crushing defeat for the Slavs. Their leader, Prince Stoignev, was killed, and his head was displayed in the field as a sign of shame; the victors beheaded around 700 prisoners. Beneath the stakes on which the headless bodies were impaled, Stoignev’s campaign priest lay dying, blinded, his tongue torn out and his limbs broken.

*Baptism or Death! Werner Graul, 1936*

Yet even this did not deter the Varangians. Between 983 and 1002, the Lutici rose up. The imperial administration and the church were driven out of the Varangian coastal region. The rebels seized the bishoprics in Brandenburg and Havelberg, and ransacked the monastery in Kalbe. In Starigard, the Lutici joined forces with the Obodrites, who in 983 once again marched on

long-suffering Hamburg. The bishop of Weligard, or more precisely, of Mecklenburg, John, was paraded through towns and villages for a long time, and then, having been brought to Radigost, was sacrificed to Svarozhich: his body was hacked to pieces and scattered, and his head was impaled on a spear and fixed to the wall of the fortress-church. In exactly the same way, our epic heroes dealt with their enemies – with Tugarin and with Zhidovin. And Prince Svyatoslav's Rus' forces dealt with the Byzantine commander Kurkuas in precisely this manner, openly referring to him as a 'sacrificial animal'.

The imperial princes, with the support of the Poles, attempted to attack the rebels, but were defeated every time. Then Henry ZZ changed tactics and concluded a treaty with the Lutichians, much to the indignation of the Church (it was then that talk began of the 'bloody banners of the devil Svarozhich'), using their help against Poland. After the Poles, together with the Germans, had attacked them, the Lutychi, I imagine, were only too happy to give them a taste of their own medicine. Henry valued his allies so highly that he forced a certain overzealous Christian, who had thrown a stone at a banner bearing a pagan goddess during the campaign, to pay the Lutici a substantial fine.

In 1043, the Danish king Magnus attacked Volyn-Vinet. His warriors did not attempt to scale the impregnable walls, but managed to destroy the dam – and a deluge swept over the city. Little remained for the Danes. 'The largest city in Europe' became a maritime legend, and sailors whispered to one another for a long time afterwards about where one could hear bells ringing beneath the water.

In 1066, the Lutici and the Obodrite nobility killed Prince Gotschalk, who had attempted to establish an independent Wends state with the support of… the Danish king and the Archbishop of Bremen. Such 'independence' did not sit well with the Obodrites. The rebels summoned the clever and brave commander Krut from Rügen-Rügen, who had been successful in fighting the Germans. He was, however, killed by Gotschalk's son, Henry.

In 1113, the Obodrite principality collapsed. In 1131, Niklot was proclaimed prince of the Bodrichi (a small tribe), whilst Heinrich's nephew, Pribyslav, was proclaimed prince of the Wagrs and Polabians. Both were staunch opponents of Christianity and the Germans. However, the strength of the Varangian principalities was waning – several centuries of almost constant warfare with fanatical Christians, and the tightening ring of the blockade, were taking their toll. The Pomeranians and part of the Lutici submitted to Poland, while Rügen, the sanctuary of the many-faced gods, became a vassal of the Danes. In 1138, it was Wagria's turn, and by 1142 the principality of Pribislav had been conquered. In 1147, Pope Eugene III proclaimed a crusade against the Varangian pagans, in which Henry the Lion, the Danish kings Canute and Sweyn, Bishop Asker and many others took part. However, the crusaders were routed, thanks to the fact that the Obodrites, the Pomeranians and the inhabitants of Rügen acted in unison. This was precisely what the Varangian Pomerania had lacked throughout its history. In the Bay of Wismar and on land, the invaders' fleet and army were routed.

*Niklot*

*The Death of Niklot*

It was this very battle that served as the basis for A.K. Tolstoy's magnificent poem *Borivoy* (the character of Borivoy is most likely a depiction of Niklot).

However, the Obodrites broke their alliance and sought reconciliation with the Christians. To tell the truth, their actions had no bearing whatsoever on the fate of Denmark, which Niklot's warriors from Rügen and Pomerania ravaged from one end to the other with fire and sword in 1152.

In 1157, the Lutici lost their independence for good, with no one coming to their aid.

In the same year, the Danes tested Arkona's defences but were defeated. Three years later, they returned, supported from the mainland by the troops of Henry the Lion. Niklot fell in battle, and the Obodrites were subjugated. The final spark was the uprising led by Pribyslav, Niklot's son, in 1164. Alas, he did not achieve victory, nor, it seems, could he have done so by then. In 1174, he acknowledged himself as a vassal of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa and was granted the title of Duke of Mecklenburg.

*Sacrileges*

To this day, a marble statue of Niklot on horseback stands proudly in the courtyard of the Mecklenburg Dukes' castle in Schwerin. Having died undefeated, he smiles, his marble eyes gazing into some other world, where the red banners of Sventovit still flutter above the white cliffs of Arkona and trade still bustles beneath the sturdy walls of the twelve-gated Volyn-Vineta.

In 1168, the Crusader armies took Arkona. The triumphant Bishop Absalon rode astride the defeated idol of Sventovit, which was being dragged towards the sea by a team of oxen.

That was the end.

People still lived there. The language still resonated – near Lübeck, as late as the 15th century, villages thrived whose inhabitants' speech was understandable to a traveller from the Slavic Balkans without an interpreter; on Rügen, Slavic was spoken until the 16th century, and on the Elbe until the 18th. What creates civilisation was missing – meaning. There was nothing for which people were prepared to die, and for which they wanted to live.

## EPILOGUE

*An ancient flame in the shrines of the*
*saints... Faithful friends, bridges burned...*
*Memories bitter of those bloody years...*
*Lost in the black midnight...*

*Who, if not us, will rekindle the flame?*
*Smoke obscures the view, the distance*
*blinds the eye... Who, if not us, will greet*
*the rainbow? It is hard to trudge through*
*waist-deep snow.*
**Veleslav**

At first I wanted to write a very long epilogue. I'd even thought of a title – 'How the Slavic Atlantis Was Forgotten'. But then I realised – there's no need. It's like standing at the grave of a murdered and slandered grandfather, loudly denouncing the slanderers and murderers. At gravesides, people keep silent. Well, they don't shout, at any rate.

I simply want to ask you, the reader, about three things.

First, something not very important. Please don't take offence. It wasn't always easy for me to write this book, and I suppose that shows. Never mind, we'll talk about it again and again. After all, we've only just touched on the history of the Slavic Atlantis – really, there were five big books about it a hundred years ago; I couldn't squeeze them all in, let alone what we've learnt over the past century, into this one, this little book!

We'll talk more about it.

If you're interested, of course.

And – go and look for it. Look for it, gather up what has been written about it. After all, it is our source, our beginning.

Talk about it. Remember it. And its people – our ancestors. They deserve it.

And finally, the third point. Probably the most important.

They had temples whose splendour dazzled even those who had seen papal Rome.

They had cities unlike any others in Europe at that time.

Their warriors were feared by Roman legionaries and Scandinavian

Vikings. Their merchants traded with the whole world.

Their peasants did not know the word

'hunger'. And now they are gone.

They lacked just one small thing – the ability to trust and to be loyal. The ability to stand by one another. The ability to forget grievances – from personal ones to those of 'our grandfathers' wars'.

And now they are no more.

Do you have all that?

Will we?

BERSERKER
BOOKS